THE HARPER PRIZE SHORT STORIES

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THE HARPER PRIZE
SHORT STORIES

THE HARPER PRIZE SHORT STORIES

THE TWELVE PRIZE-WINNING SHORT STORIES
IN THE 1924–25 SHORT STORY CONTEST
CONDUCTED BY *Harper's Magazine*

THE JUDGES

Meredith Nicholson, Zona Gale, Bliss Perry

THE AUTHORS

Conrad Aiken, Edwina Stanton Babcock, Margaret Culkin Banning, Alice Brown, Ada Jack Carver, Charles Caldwell Dobie, Phoebe H. Gilkyson, A. R. Leach, Fleta Campbell Springer, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Lisa Ysaye Tarleau

With an Introduction by

BLISS PERRY

Professor of English Literature
Harvard University

Harper & Brothers Publishers
New York and London
1925

THE HARPER PRIZE SHORT STORIES

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PREFACE

It was the success of the Harper Prize Novel Contest which suggested it. When the House of Harper, two or three years ago, offered two thousand dollars (in addition to royalties) for the best novel submitted by an American writer who had not had a novel published prior to 1914, there were many gloomy predictions that the Contest would fail to produce anything noteworthy; yet Miss Margaret Wilson's novel, *The Able McLaughlins,* which won the prize, instantly became the best seller and incidentally was given the Pulitzer award for 1923. The idea that the Magazine should likewise engineer a contest followed naturally; and it won favor in the editorial councils because it seemed thoroughly in accord with the traditional policy of the Magazine: the policy of seeking not only the most interesting but also the most distinguished fiction, and of encouraging new writers of genuine promise.

The editors felt, furthermore, that a Prize Short Story Contest would not only dramatize, as it were, this policy, but would be a real service to American creative literature. The short story has become, to an amazing extent, a commercial product. There are rich financial rewards for those who can turn it out in saleable lots regardless of literary quality, and all too few rewards for those who write sincerely. To hold a contest in which genuine quality would be the criterion of success, and to offer substantial prizes seemed well worth doing.

The sum of $10,000 was set aside for prizes. It was

decided to hold four competitions during the year, each to last three months, and for the best stories submitted in each of these competitions to award a first prize of $1,250, a second prize of $750, and a third prize of $500.

It was essential to select a group of judges whose verdicts would be based on broad and sound critical judgment; and it seemed an excellent idea to have them represent different points of view, in order that their joint decisions would represent the consensus of varied opinion. Accordingly, the editors chose Meredith Nicholson, the Hoosier novelist and essayist, who was expected to look at the stories with a reasonably conservative eye; Zona Gale, the author of *Miss Lulu Bett* and *Faint Perfume,* an outstanding novelist of the modern school; and Professor Bliss Perry, professor of English literature at Harvard and one-time editor of the *Atlantic Monthly,* an eminent academic critic and man of letters, and an authority on the short story.

Foreseeing that thousands of manuscripts would be submitted and that it would be impossible for the judges to read all of them, the editors decided to return manuscripts which were clearly unavailable and to hold others for the consideration of the judges. These stories would then be set up in galley proofs and submitted to the judges without the authors' names, so that it would not be possible for the judges to be unconsciously influenced by the previous reputation of the writers.

Foreseeing also that the judges would be likely to differ in their opinions and that it would be difficult to bring them together for consultation, the editors—with the judges' consent—decided to determine the prize-winners through a point system of scoring. Each judge, exercising his independent judgment, was to indicate his first, second, third, and fourth choices. A first choice would count five points, a second

choice, three points, a third choice, two points, and a fourth choice, one point; and the prizes would be awarded to the stories which had the highest totals of points on this basis.

It was also decided that all American (and Canadian) writers should be eligible, that no particular type of story should be given preference, and that no limits to the length of stories should be set, the only guide to competitors being a statement that in general stories of from four thousand to seven thousand words would be preferred.

The announcement of the contest, as was expected, attracted widespread attention and brought a flood of manuscripts into the Harper office. More than three thousand stories were entered in the first competition, and a total of 10,370 in all four together. On the last day of each competition the mails were jammed with manuscripts, which had to be stowed away in enormous packing boxes in the office until the readers could catch up with their work and give to each manuscript the consideration that it deserved.

Finally the stories selected out of the first competition were sent to the judges. They included the work both of established and of unknown writers, and the editors, awaiting the decision, found themselves divided between the hope that a new writer would be the winner and the feeling that the selection of one who had previously won favor in the Harper office would be in a sense a vindication of editorial judgment.

As it happened, an established writer won the first competition; but the result was not clear until the last judge had reported. They disagreed widely. One preferred "Loutré," by Lisa Ysaye Tarleau, a new contributor to *Harper's* but not a new writer (she had already published a volume of essays and had contributed short stories to the *Atlantic*); another gave first place to "Women Come to Judgment," by Margaret Culkin Banning, a new Harper contributor but a

well-known novelist and short-story writer; the third chose "The Girl in the Tree," by Alice Brown, author of many a Harper story and winner (with "Children of Earth") of the ten-thousand-dollar play prize offered in 1915 by Winthrop Ames. The award of the Harper prizes clearly depended on the judges' second, third, and fourth choices. When these were tallied, the result was as follows:

First Prize to Alice Brown, for "The Girl in the Tree."

Second Prize to Lisa Ysaye Tarleau, for "Loutré."

Third Prize to Margaret Culkin Banning, for "Women Come to Judgment."

Three other stories which also figured in the tally of points were given honorable mention: "The Weather Breeder," by Merrill Denison; "A Calabrian Goes Home," by Viola Paradise; and "Mrs. Eben Paul," by Arthur Johnson.

There was plenty of food for thought in these results. An established writer had carried off first prize. All three winners, as it happened, were women. They represented different parts of the country, Miss Brown being a Bostonian, Mrs. Tarleau a New Yorker, Mrs. Banning a resident of Duluth. The prize-winning stories were as different as they well could be, "The Girl in the Tree" being a piece of romantic fancy; "Loutré," a fantastically humorous tale which ran so far beyond the usual short-story length that for a time its eligibility was seriously questioned; and "Women Come to Judgment," a realistic study of the problem faced by women who undertake jury duty. Wondering what significance these facts might have, the editors and readers of *Harper's* awaited the decision in the second competition.

Again the judges disagreed, each selecting a different story for First Prize. Again the application of the point system of scoring brought out a woman as the winner. Again it

was not a new writer, but one whose work had often been published in *Harper's,* who won. The results were as follows:

First Prize to Fleta Campbell Springer, for "Legend."

Second Prizes to Conrad Aiken, for "The Disciple," and Edwina Stanton Babcock, for "Wavering Gold."

Honorable mention to Margaret Culkin Banning, for "A Great Club Woman"; Charles Caldwell Dobie, for "The Elder Brother"; and Edgar Valentine Smith, for "Cameo."

The award of two second prizes instead of a second and a third prize is explained by the fact that the point system brought Mr. Aiken and Miss Babcock into a tie. Unwilling to divide the prizes, the editors decided to award two second prizes, despite the unexpected drain on the Harper treasury.

The judges, with no inkling of the authorship of the stories they passed on, seemed up to this time to be favoring the established author. Mrs. Springer had long been considered in the Harper office one of the ablest short-story writers in the United States. Mr. Aiken (an American resident in England) was comparatively new at fiction-writing, but well known as a poet and critic. Miss Babcock was another Harper contributor of many years' standing.

The third competition, however, turned out quite differently. For the first time the judges agreed, and with enthusiasm, and the story they agreed on was by a writer who not only had never appeared in *Harper's,* but had never had a story published in a magazine of national circulation. And of the two writers who won second prizes (again an unexpected drain on the treasury) one was a newcomer.

The results of the third competition:

First Prize to Ada Jack Carver (Mrs. J. B. Snell, of Minden, Louisiana), for "Redbone."

Second Prizes to Charles Caldwell Dobie, for "The Hands of the Enemy," and A. R. Leach, for "A Captain Out of Etruria."

Honorable mention to Walter Millis, for "Jason," and B. H. Lehman, for "Sons."

Still the supremacy of women writers continued. It was not until the fourth and final competition that a man carried off first prize. He was Wilbur Daniel Steele, whose high position in American letters is indicated by the fact that in 1921 he was chosen by the O. Henry Award Committee as the American short-story writer who had maintained the highest level of merit over a period of three years. Mr. Steel, a frequent Harper contributor, had not entered the earlier competitions. The story which he submitted in the final competition won easily by virtue of the fact that two of the judges ranked it first.

Charles Caldwell Dobie, by securing second place for the second time, became the only double prize-winner in the Contest. Again a new writer scored in the person of Phœbe H. Gilkyson, who carried off third prize.

To summarize the results of the fourth competition:

First Prize to Wilbur Daniel Steele, for "When Hell Froze."

Second Prize to Charles Caldwell Dobie, for "Wild Geese."

Third Prize to Phœbe H. Gilkyson, for "The Amateur."

Honorable mention to Rose Wilder Lane, for "The Blue Bead," and Katharine Fullerton Gerould, for "An Army with Banners."

The twelve prize stories are included in the present volume. For permission to reprint them the thanks of the House of Harper are expressed to their authors, and in the case of

"THE DISCIPLE," also to Messrs. Boni & Liveright, publishers of Mr. Aiken's *Bring, Bring and Other Stories,* in which it is included.

The stories vary widely in subject-matter and treatment; yet each, we believe, has a genuine claim to distinction. As a collection we believe them to be significantly representative of the best American short-story writing of the present day.

INTRODUCTION

THE twelve tales in this collection are the blue-ribboned prize-winners of the *Harper's* short-story contest in 1924. I forget now how many thousands of stories were submitted in each quarter of that year. But there were enough, surely, to try even the professional patience of those editorial readers who made the preliminary choices and referred the outstanding stories of each quarter to the three final judges. As I happened to be one of those judges, I must assume one-third of the responsibility for the results. Everybody who has acted as a judge in a contest in debating, poetry, or fiction—or, for that matter, everybody who has umpired a ball game or served on a jury—knows that there come certain moments of absolute omniscience and instantaneous decision. One magisterial wave of the hand, and the runner is "out" or "safe"! Two minutes later you may be secretly aware of the monumental error of your decision. It is quite possible that you may be openly reminded of it! But the tender-hearted editors of *Harper's* arranged a beautifully simple mathematical scheme for protecting their judges alike from the remorse of conscience and from the personal assaults of unsuccessful contestants. We simply voted, without consultation, so many "points" for first, second, and third places in each quarterly contest. The points were added, and the winners won and the losers lost! Whatever private opinion there may have been as to the mentality and morality of the judges never reached us at all. Thus we were able to retain our pleasurable sense of individual omniscience, as

well as our sublime American faith in the omnipotence of numbers; for of course the figures could not lie.

And I am bound to say, on rereading the twelve successful stories, that at least two out of the three judges seem to have known their business. Whatever momentary doubts—about the sanity of the other judges, of course!—one may have had as the contest progressed, are quite forgotten in the presence of these twelve glistening and beribboned specimens of the short story-teller's art.

That they possess a certain representative quality is undeniable. In fact it is quite possible that a disgruntled critic, remembering the conventional disparagement of pictures that have won a "Prix de Rome," might assert that these, too, are "Prix de Rome" pieces; the kind of stories, that is to say, that would naturally win the approval of American magazine editors and of judges who are conversant with the standards of "acceptability." Readers who exalt waywardness of beauty and freakishness of experimentation with narrative patterns, may conceivably prefer to buy another book. It is true, now and then, that "nothing damns like success." Nothing is more sterile than the repetition of accepted patterns. But after all, no dozen players ever qualified at the top of an open golf tournament without revealing some qualities and methods that are of interest to lovers of the game.

It is to be expected, surely, that the survivors of a long process of elimination should reveal a mastery of style. Few persons who will read these twelve stories will question the assertion that they are well written. Some of the authors have long enjoyed a national reputation as writers; others have hitherto been almost unknown to magazine readers; but those of us who passed judgment on the stories without knowing the authorship would have found it diffi-

cult to decide, by the mere test of narrative style, who were the authors of repute and who were the newcomers. Pupils are every day hanging their canvases by the side of canvases painted by their masters; and a Carolus Duran must be careful lest his young pupil, John Sargent, be thought to paint better than his teacher!

This volume is within the sound traditions of the American short story in another respect also—namely, its stress upon design. These stories are competently plotted. They have a theme—even a theme which can be stated, though it would overtax my ingenuity to demonstrate precisely the "germ" or "kernel" of the fascinating tale entitled "Legend." But even that story, for all its element of psychological romance, its playing with illusion, has a beginning, a middle and an end. And so do all the rest of them. Admirers of Katharine Mansfield, of Chekhov and the younger Russians may have their dubieties about the well-built story, just as the younger dramatists have their certainties of disapprobation for the well-built play, but here are a dozen good yarns which lose nothing by being well woven, in designs complicated enough to be interesting. There is a place, of course, for the patternless story, but it does not happen to be found in this particular book.

It is nearly one hundred years since Poe and Hawthorne revealed to the American public the possibilities of short-story technique. In that long interval there have been few volumes of American tales which have not exhibited somewhere an engaging ingenuity, a quick fancy, and the shock of surprise. Our writers possess a native knack and deftness in these matters, and the *Harper's* prize stories, however far they range in their quest for color and variety, are excellent illustrations of this native art of keeping the reader on the alert. Whether the themes deal with pure

romance or with the analysis of character and motive, the manipulation of the material is noticeably expert.

And how natural is the alliance between romantic themes and ingenuities of plot, between whimsicalities of character and unexpected *dénoûments!* Three of these stories, for instance,—"Loutré," "The Disciple," and "A Captain Out of Etruria,"—deal with that romance of Europe which never goes out of fashion. Scene: Paris! With such glimpses of Italy as may easily be attained by the American colony! The delightful "Loutré" may have a touch of Leonard Merrick and of Anatole France; "The Disciple," with its curious blending of the Wandering Jew and Judas legends, a touch of Stevenson's "Markheim"; and "A Captain Out of Etruria," with its sophisticated American artist and unsophisticated American young girl and a young man who is a mixture of sophistication and amazing *naïveté,* more than a touch of Henry James. But this is only saying that many pitchers can be filled at the same sparkling fountain, that the water changes color at every instant, and that no two artistically fashioned pitchers are ever of quite the same design.

Two of the stories deal with the romance of the Far West. "The Hands of the Enemy" is none the worse for its blend of Bret Harte and the moving pictures. The swift succession of play and counterplay might have been a bit too theatrical even for Bret Harte's fancy, but that gifted writer died too soon to profit by the lesson of the films. "Legend" could not possibly be filmed, for even the courtroom scene is untheatrical, yet the story is tense with drama, and the picture of those tall "Klinger girls" on horseback haunts one's imagination strangely.

Three of the stories utilize symbols of romantic escape from the pressure of reality. In the light and charming

"Wild Geese" the symbol is a ship's model, carried from England to Gloucester and thence to a remote California valley. To the girl who owns it the model means the sea—freedom; and to the English collector who pursues it it typifies the sea that is in his blood. In "Wavering Gold" the symbol of escape is Lionel the gold-fish, and never surely did a gold-fish find queerer quarters or become involved in a stranger and more romantically satisfying rescue of a damsel in distress. The heroine of "The Girl in the Tree" is not in the least in distress. She is the personification of quiet triumph. The symbol of escape is simply a book, and a first book at that, but when it is read aloud to that circle of covetous relatives—entangled, as the Apostle might say, with the affairs of this life—the book becomes prepotent, and for one moonlit night, at least, magically liberating.

Contrasts and struggles of character are the themes of "The Amateur," "When Hell Froze," and "Women Come to Judgment." There is plenty of local color and atmosphere here. "The Amateur" and "Women Come to Judgment" turn chiefly upon the difficult questions of moral casuistry involved in a young woman's lie. Are both lies "white"? Or are they simply gray, the protective coloration demanded by a peculiar environment? Amateur psychologists can make their guesses. And why did the lonely, strong, proud farm woman of "When Hell Froze" change her mind? The amateur psychologist had better go very carefully when he tramps over hill farms. Life is more intense there than it is in the valleys.

Yet I must retract that statement at once, for is not the scene of "Redbone" in a valley—the valley of the "witch-river" of Louisiana, inhabited by a gay, hybrid, and tragic race? Here is a tropical blaze of color, an atmosphere heavy with heat and odor, and charged with portents of disaster.

Here are superstition, immemorial race instincts, exaltation and adoration, comedy, love and irony, treachery and revenge; and everything in the story—background and personages and speech and action—is set to the music of a delicate and rich style. No, the gods of the hills are not the gods of the valleys, but passion is passion everywhere.

BLISS PERRY

THE HARPER PRIZE
SHORT STORIES

LOUTRÉ

By

Lisa Ysaye Tarleau

ARISTIDE TRITOU stood at the window of his gray and cheerless room and looked out into the dreary dullness of a dark November day. The weather was truly unfortunate: not exactly cold but—ever so much worse—damp and chilly; the rain which hung all ready in the skies would presently fall down, blur the window-panes, run in dirty streaks down the sills, and add to the general misery of the scene.

"Oh, hang it all," muttered Aristide, "hang it all." And throwing himself on his rather rickety couch-bed, he began to ruminate about the weather. Poor people, he decided, ought to live in a land of eternal summer. Tahiti. Vailima. Anywhere, where the earth is kindly and the sun gives you warmth and cheer, fills your veins with a sweet fire, and permits you to dream away idly and languorously long and golden hours. To live in such an infernal climate as ours one must at least have money. Then one can sit by a blazing fire and enjoy an artificial summer; one can light one's room and have a splendid lamp like a personal sun at the table, and some old wine, sipped slowly and dreamily, would provide sweet fire for the veins. Substitutes, of course, but oh, what charming ones! Only one had to be able to pay for them. Well, he was not able to do so. He had not a sou.

"Damn it!" he shouted, while he jumped up from his bed, "damn it, where can I get some money?"

He ran in his mind over the list of his friends, but the outlook was poor; most of them had nothing themselves, and to those who had even a little bit he was already a debtor. Then he thought of Pierre de Kersac, the editor of *La Revue Illustrée*. If he could get a few francs out of him! Just the price of a good meal and an evening in a café. It would be difficult—Kersac had been rather cool lately—twice he had refused him a loan. But then, there was nobody else. Evidently he would have to try Kersac.

Aristide began to lace his shoes, preliminary to his venturing forth to capture the golden fleece, and while he did so he thought of a thousand things which he meant to tell Kersac in justification of the demand for a loan. They were all splendid inventions, some beautifully simple, some highly ornate and elaborate, but Aristide had to discard one after the other. No, they would not do; Kersac was already wise to the game; he would not fall for any of these gabs. Well, he had to trust to the inspiration of the moment. He straightened his back, stretched his long limbs, and took a somewhat faded hat from a shelf in the closet.

"At least," he sneered, "I have not painfully to decide whether or not I shall put on my rubbers. I have no rubbers to put on. Life is full of delightful compensations."

When Aristide reached the office of *La Revue Illustrée* he had first to face an impudent office boy, who requested him to fill out a card stating whom he wanted to see and for what purpose, and who asked him, furthermore, many unnecessary and highly annoying questions. But Aristide's inventive genius was equal to the emergency of the moment. He filled out the card, demanding to see some sub-editor and,

while the office boy sauntered away, Aristide strode boldly into the sanctuary of the chief, Monsieur de Kersac. Kersac looked ill pleased when Aristide appeared in the door.

"Tritou," he actually snarled, "who the devil let you in? That boy out there ought to be fired. I am swamped with work—I can't see anybody."

But Aristide, who was already seated in one of the deep and soft *fauteuils,* stretching his long legs in front of him, said amiably:

"Put your work aside. I came, my dear Kersac, to bestow a favor upon you."

Kersac muttered something of *Timeo Danaos,* but Aristide did not permit him to finish the quotation.

"We all know your classical erudition, my dear fellow," he smiled, "but what I bring is not the doubtful present of wily Greeks. I bring you the gift of the Magi. Even more than that: something more precious than gold, myrrh, and frankincense. I bring you a marvelous, perfect, delightful *conte.* Something exquisite for your exquisite magazine."

But Kersac was only a little mollified.

"I'll tell you, Tritou," he said, "your *contes* are all right, but we have already run a lot of them. And, frankly, in the end they are all the same. Again and again you give us fools who think they fool one another and only fool themselves; again and again you show us the futility, the utter uselessness, the ironic emptiness of life and fate. Now mind you, I don't say that your stuff isn't good. It's clever. Damnably clever. But one gets easily fed up on it. That cynical pessimism is all right now and then, but the public doesn't want too much of it. We have to give them more constructive stuff, a saner outlook, a—what shall I say? . . ."

Aristide smiled mockingly. "My dear fellow," he in-

terrupted, "if you were not an editor but a writer you might have told me in two words what you want to say. You do not want cleverness in your magazine, you want wisdom. Well, it's just what I'm going to offer you. My *conte* is not merely clever, it's in addition deep, profound, powerful, startlingly unusual and surprisingly human—in one word: a gem. I'm going to tell you my plot and you will see."

Kersac saw that he could not escape, so he relaxed in his chair, yawned deeply and sleepily, and said:

"Well, go ahead, go ahead. I'm listening."

Aristide shook his hair back from his forehead, took a cigarette from Kersac's desk without waiting for an invitation and, when he had lighted it, began in his most deep and sonorous voice:

"Permit me to introduce to you Loutré. Loutré is a criminal; not a romantic criminal but a sordid one. He preys on the weak and helpless; he lives on his women. Now and then he does a little blackmail. Anything, in short, that pays well and is safe. Because Loutré is a coward. Despite his splendid physique—you must imagine him over six feet tall and decidedly handsome—despite his splendid physique, I say, he is as yellow as they make them. Never takes a risk. Always out to save his skin. Would betray anything and anybody unscrupulously if he sees his advantage in it, and is consequently despised by the police as well as by his fellow criminals. Only women fall for him. As I told you, he is a handsome devil.

"One day the *Matin,* having nothing else to do, runs a series of articles about the crime wave, and in consequence the police get busy. The usual thing, you know. Raids, arrests, investigations, and so forth. Crime becomes less profitable and more dangerous than ever. And Loutré hates every danger. He decides, therefore, to leave his old haunts

and his chosen associates and to disappear for a while. To do something else. But what? Suddenly he remembers a certain girl who had been arrested for shoplifting and sentenced to the Reformatory. Somebody had told him only lately that this girl had gone into the movies and was making a lot of money. He determines to find out with what company she is working, and so he does. One fair morning he accosts that poor girl on her way to the studio, and in his best blackmailing manner he puts the proposition before her! 'Either you get me a position with your company, or I'll tell what I know.' I'll spare you all the details of the dickering—sufficient to say, he gets what he demands. He is introduced as a relative of the girl and the director gives him a tryout. And by a queer chance Loutré does well. He screens quite wonderfully, and his gestures have a savage, natural effectiveness which is most astounding. Loutré becomes thus at once a full-fledged screen actor, and as he is really good-looking they make him play the heroes.

"Every day now he rescues Innocence out of the clutches of Vice; every day he succors the Poor; every day he withers the Villain with his proud silence; every day, in short, he is more virtuous than Sir Galahad in person. And since this virtue pays, he enjoys it. His salary becomes ever more fantastic, his contracts ever more favorable, his name more and more a household word in this movie-mad world of ours. And that goes on for years. And then suddenly comes a crash. He is involved in some scandal. A hotel affair. Too much wine, too much drugs, too much everything, and a girl dies. And Loutré, the idol of the public, becomes an outcast. His contracts are not renewed, his pictures are no longer booked, he is done for. He drops out. From one day to another he is forgotten. Nothing is left for him but to return to his former life!"

Aristide paused, and reached for another cigarette. Kersac shoved the box over to him, and even gave him a light. "Well," he asked, "and what then?"

"Then," explained Aristide, "begins the real tragedy. Loutré finds out that one cannot be virtuous for years without paying for it in the end. One cannot constantly parade as a hero and be afterward successful as a villain. Poor Loutré cannot bully his women any more—for too long a time his cue was to protect and to defend them. Even at blackmail he is now a failure. Why, he is constantly tempted to take himself by the scruff of the neck and to hand himself over to the police! He has done it over and over again with his partners who were cast for this thankless role. Thus he deteriorates and goes to pieces—a helpless victim of stern and pitiless virtue."

Kersac smiled a bit. "Musset says: *'On ne badine pas avec l'amour'*—'One must not toy with love'; your opinion evidently is: *'On ne badine pas avec la vertu'*."

Aristide nodded. "One must not toy idly with, or for that matter at, any emotion without paying some price for it. In the end you feel what you pretend to feel, you become what you play at being. At this point, you see, my little *conte* gains breadth, depth, perspective. I refer, then, not only to the results of modern psychology—Coué, you know, autosuggestion, the subconscious self, and so on—but also bring in ancient occult beliefs, significant hints out of the childhood of mankind. Have you ever read Frazer's monumental work, *The Golden Bough?* Just look up the chapter on Imitative Magic—how the Imitator becomes the Very Thing he imitates. That's something stupendous, something thrilling. And all this is worked in somehow. Just as background, you know. Atmosphere. I'll tell you, Kersac, that

Loutré thing will go big. It will make some hit. And now say that I'm not good to you."

"Well," retorted Kersac, "to write for *La Revue Illustrée* is, after all, not such a sacrifice. But anyway, don't let's scrap about it. Just give me the story and I'll write you a check."

"Why no," said Aristide with a rather engaging smile, "just give me a check and I'll write you the story."

Kersac stared blankly at the impudent visitor.

"You mean to say," he asked, "that the story isn't done at all?"

Aristide became at once voluble. "Done? What do you mean by done? Have I shown you Loutré? Have I created him? Does he live? You were ready to accept him—that's proof enough. All that remains to be done is the mere mechanical work of writing the thing down. But to do that I need a warm room, a meal, some cigarettes, even paper and a typewriter ribbon. And I happen to be out of all these commodities. So for your sake, simply to be able to provide your magazine with a splendid success, I am willing to accept an advance. That Loutré stuff is worth five hundred francs, isn't it? Well, give me two hundred francs now and you'll get the manuscript to-morrow."

Kersac was furious. "I won't give you a red sou until I have the story," he shouted. "I know you too well."

Aristide shrugged his shoulders. "Suit yourself," he said nonchalantly. "I am not so fond of life that I should care if I prolong it for a while or not. For my part I can starve. It was for your sake that I wished to keep alive and to write you a howling success. But it's up to you, of course."

Kersac looked utterly disgusted.

"I'll give you twenty francs," he growled, "not a sou more."

Aristide shook his head. "It has to be two hundred or nothing," he insisted.

"Then it will be nothing," said Kersac in a tone of utter finality.

Aristide got up and went to the door; he went very slowly, to give Kersac a chance to change his mind, and his heart sank when the editor busied himself among his papers without making any move. Aristide had already turned the handle and his hopes were at their lowest ebb when Kersac called him back. "Here," he said, "take a hundred francs and go to the devil."

And while Aristide pocketed the money, he added sternly: "And mind you, I want this manuscript to-morrow. I might run it in the New Year's number."

Aristide was nearly dancing with delight when he left the offices of *La Revue Illustrée*. Oh, what luck, what luck, what splendid, unheard-of, spectacular luck! He would have been happy with ten francs, well satisfied with five, and now he had a hundred. The whole world seemed to him suddenly golden; the sky was diffused with a mellow light; Paris was again the most delectable city, and he felt the mad desire to laugh idiotically into the face of every passer-by. Well, he assured himself after a few steps, this stroke of fortune was not quite undeserved. *Loutré* was really not a half-bad invention. One could do something effective with that plot; he was almost tempted to write the story down. But then, who wants to work with a hundred francs in his pocket, who wants to write when he can live? And he would live now—he would enjoy himself gorgeously and forget the lean weeks. Aristide, who usually slouched a bit, stretched

himself to his full height and looked the world triumphantly in the face. And in this somewhat operatic attitude of a conquering hero, he met Monsieur Fabian Felix, the great illustrator, who was evidently bound for *La Revue Illustrée*.

Aristide had not much love for Fabian Felix, who was small, slim, dark, very oriental, and unbearably successful. There was not an editor who would not congratulate himself when he could display in his magazine one of Felix's distinctive drawings, and to be illustrated one day by F. F. was something every aspiring young author dreamed of. All this irritated Aristide, and whenever he met Felix he showed clearly that he despised some one who earned so outrageously much money. But to-day he felt no grudge against Felix. To-day he himself had a hundred francs in his pocket. To-day he was a fellow-capitalist. He waved a friendly greeting to the little man and strode on into the flickering lights of the darkening November day.

Felix went really to *La Revue Illustrée* and was at once respectfully ushered into the office of Monsieur de Kersac. And while the two looked over the proofs of some illustrations, Felix said casually:

"I met young Tritou downstairs. He seemed in a very genial mood. He was almost polite to me, and usually he treats me with marked displeasure."

Kersac laughed. "Oh well," he declared, "Tritou is a fool, and yet I'll tell you, Felix, that boy has some talent. If he only were not so damnably lazy, I could make something out of him. He's doing a fine story for us now. *Loutré's* the name of it. Tells of some apache who becomes an actor and plays the virtuous hero so long that he is utterly spoiled for the life of vice. The thing sounded great when he told it to me—it has atmosphere, background. It's deep, profound. He works in modern psychology, Coué and so

on; and in addition to it ancient beliefs, imitative magic, childhood of mankind, and so forth. It's popular and scientific at the same time, and usually that goes big. If it turns out all right I might ask you to illustrate it, and we'll feature it in the New Year's number. Perhaps we can stretch it through two issues. I'll see how the thing looks. No harm in giving that fellow a show."

"Certainly, why certainly," agreed Felix, who was a kind-hearted little man, "I'll be glad to help along. And I am really pleased that that young chap has found himself. We need young talent, Kersac. The old masters are all well and good for To-day, but To-morrow belongs to Youth." And very delighted with this epigram, which he fondly believed to be first rate, he trotted on.

It was foggy but the threatening rain hung still in the skies, and as Felix felt that he needed some exercise he sent away his car, which had called for him, and walked to his apartment near the Parc Monceau. On his way he met Berthe Morissey, who once had been a sharp-witted, slim young girl, and who was now a sharp-tongued, thin young wife of a most unsuccessful Neo-Catholic playwright. She greeted Felix very effusively—she adored and envied successes—and at once began to tell him her woes. The managers were all unjust, the actors all unreasonable, and Charles deplorably lacking in ambition. Always writing mystical things that did not go or were not accepted, always sitting in the cafés instead of visiting the right kind of people, always wasting his time instead of working and making connections. Felix listened sympathetically but he felt decidedly bored and, after a while, just to get away, he petted her hand and said:

"Never mind, Berthe, never mind. Charles will find him-

self. They all do in the end. Now, there is that Aristide Tritou; you know him, he is a friend of your husband, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Berthe acidly. "A lazy good-for-nothing. He owes us five francs."

"Well," said Felix smiling, "he's making his way now. He's doing a fine thing for *La Revue Illustrée.* The name of it is *Loutré,* and Kersac was most impressed by it. He tells me that it is a combination of a very effective popular story and a very profound treatise on modern and ancient psychology. Coué, you know, and so on, and then imitative magic, primitive beliefs out of the childhood of mankind. Utterly interesting. Something like the things Lafitte publishes. Kersac wants me to illustrate it, and perhaps he'll run it through several issues. So you see, Berthe, if Tritou made the grade, Charles surely will. Don't worry."

Felix meant well, but he did not understand women. Berthe was neither heartened nor encouraged by Tritou's success: she was utterly enraged by it. And while she hurried home her inflamed imagination magnified this success, and the more she magnified it, the greater became her rage. She was absolutely burning with indignation when she opened the door of her little apartment, and as soon as she found Charles she emptied over his head the vials of her wrath.

"Here you're sitting and smoking and doing nothing, and everybody else makes a success," she scolded. "Even that Aristide Tritou, that fool, that nobody, gets somewhere, becomes something; only you are a failure."

Charles was so accustomed to her reproaches that usually he hardly answered, but when she mentioned Tritou he became interested.

"Aristide," he asked, "what happened to him?"

"Happened," sneered Berthe, "nothing happened. Things never happen. He did something. He wrote a most wonderful book. I met Fabian Felix on the street, and he told me all about it. He illustrated it, *La Revue Illustrée* ran it serially, and Lafitte published it. The name of it is *Loutré*, and it is something stupendous. Not only popular but scientific. Full of psychology, and Coué, and imitative magic, and primitive beliefs, and all such things. He is bound to get the Prix Goncourt for it."

"Well, well," said Charles, "that's fine. I am surprised and I am glad too. So old Aristide is a made man. A book illustrated by Felix, that means something. And Lafitte as a publisher is not so bad either. And did you say it was mentioned for the Prix Goncourt? If I had his address I'd write the old boy a word of congratulation. Well, don't be so furious about it, Berthe. His luck does not make us any poorer."

But Berthe was not in a mood to reason. She banged the door, crashed her dishes into the kitchen sink, and cried bitter tears of envy and resentment in her disappointment and loneliness.

Aristide could have lived quietly for a month on his hundred francs; comfortably for two weeks; luxuriously for a few days. But he preferred to spend them gloriously in one night. So that the next morning he was almost as poor as ever before, only that now there was no more Kersac out of whom one could get some money. With Kersac, Aristide was done. He would not dare to show his face to the editor for at least six months. In the meantime winter would come and his needs would increase. There was to-day already a sharp tang in the air and Aristide shivered in his

threadbare clothes. With infinite disgust he decided that he would have to look out for some work.

Fate was merciful to Aristide and the work was found. A small, old-fashioned publisher—an Alsatian by birth, Monsieur Frederic Mondell, whose specialty was textbooks for primary schools, books on domestic science, needlework, applied arts, home decoration, and, as a hobby, books of poetry—needed a reader and office assistant, and Aristide secured the position. His happiness was not unalloyed: the salary was small, the hours rather long, and Monsieur Mondell insisted, annoyingly on punctual attendance. But the income was secure, and Aristide felt that now he could face the chill blasts of the coming frost with a certain degree of comfort and confidence.

Thus, Aristide tramped every morning to the office, wrote business letters in which the subtle excellencies of his style were utterly wasted, read manuscripts which bored him beyond measure, and corrected proofs whose main mistake in his eyes were that they were printed at all. Sometimes he discussed literature with Monsieur Mondell, both smoking like chimneys, both declaiming their own poetry, both quarreling violently and being, in consequence, infinitely pleased with each other. Supper the two usually had together in a little Alsatian restaurant where the cooking was so good that the waitress could be unattractive, and after supper Aristide trudged home and read. He had always been a voracious reader, the fellowship of books meaning more to him than any other relation, and this winter, having just enough for the immediate necessities of life and no extra money to spend in cafés and cabarets, he read more than ever before. His former haunts knew him no more. Sometimes he thought sleepily and lazily of going to the Trois Couronnes, the special rendezvous of all the budding literati,

but he had to be at the office so very early in the morning and his purse was so damnably lean. It was better to postpone the visit. So the weeks went by.

At the Trois Couronnes the regular guests were usually so taken up with their own interests that they did not give much thought to those who, for one reason or another, dropped out. But Aristide had been quite popular; his facile wit and his amusing cynicism combined with a certain personal charm had won him many friends, and when one week after the other passed and no Tritou was to be seen, his comrades began to wonder.

"What the devil happened to that Aristide?" they said. "Is he ill? One does not see him any more."

One evening Charles Morissey was present when that question was asked again, and he laughed, half amused, half bitterly.

"Of course one does not see him any more. We'll probably never see him again. Aristide is lost to us—he made a success."

Everyone was surprised and interested.

"Aristide a success? Who would have ever believed it. Who told you, Charles?"

"My wife told me," sighed Morissey. "In fact she tells me about it every day. She rubs it in as much as she can. She is quite jaundiced from envy, and if she hates anyone more than me, then it's surely Aristide."

"But what did he do that enrages her so?" was asked.

"Well, he wrote a book," reported Charles. "I haven't seen it; he forgot to send me a presentation copy and I have, God knows, no money for an edition de luxe with illustrations by Fabian Felix. But so much I can tell you, it's some grand thing he did. You know how we always laughed at him when he lugged those big Frazer books around, the

Golden Bough series? Now it seems that he did his reading to some advantage. His book—the title of it is *Loutré*—is scientific fiction or fictionized science, whatever you will. He has worked in Coué—autosuggestion, subconscious personality; and then primitive beliefs, imitative magic, and so on. Very up-to-date and very effective. F. F. illustrated it, he told my wife all about it, it ran some time ago serially in *La Revue Illustrée,* and Lafitte has published it. And to make the measure full, it was mentioned for the Prix Goncourt. Do you wonder we don't see him any more?"

The tidings were received with sympathy, regret, and envy. They rejoiced that a comrade had succeeded, but at the same time they knew only too well that, once famous, he was not a comrade any longer. They had lost him, not through death but through life, and this loss is much more final and depressing. And then there was a little envy blended into the complex of their emotions. Why just Aristide and not they? Why had luck just chosen that one and not another? Only Charles said hotly and honestly:

"I don't begrudge Aristide his success. Really I don't. What makes me mad is that he has dropped us all so promptly. He might have come round now and then to shake hands and talk over old times. He might have let us take part in his glory. He meant very much to me, that old Aristide, and I feel like breaking his neck for being so mean now. But well, I suppose that's the way they all get. Success spoils the character."

And then the guests of the Trois Couronnes settled down to their usual routine, and nobody spoke any more of Aristide.

Monsieur Frederic Mondell was a funny, rotund little man, with a bald head, myopic eyes, pudgy hands, and a waddling

walk. His accent was ridiculous, his verses execrable, yet there lived no truer knight of the Nine Muses than this little impossible Alsatian. He loved and understood poetry and, what is rarer, he loved and understood poets. The most disreputable-looking young man who came to him with a manuscript of verses under his arm was certain to receive a hearing, and whenever Monsieur Mondell seemed to detect any talent he published without thinking of his personal advantage. All the profit he made out of his textbooks, and cookbooks, and books on domestic science went into these little volumes of contemporary poetry which he issued with a pride and delight never accorded to his more profitable ventures. His friends sometimes argued with him over the folly of so costly a hobby, but Mondell did not heed them. He was a bachelor—his personal needs were almost negligible, and, in the end, silencing every argument, he always declaimed his well-beloved Heine's warning:

"Verletze nicht durch kalten Ton
Den Juengling, welcher duerftig, fremd,
Um Hilfe bittend zu Dir koemmt—
Er ist vielleicht ein Goettersohn.
Siehst Du ihn wieder einst, sodann
Die Gloria sein Haupt unflammt;
Den strengen Blick, der Dich verdammt,
Dein Auge nicht ertragen kann."

One fine morning in February such a potential *"Goettersohn,"* a genius of the Trois Couronnes accosted Monsieur Mondell on the street, offering him an epic poem in three volumes. Monsieur Mondell trembled; he knew he would never say no, but he knew also that just at present the

luxury of another unsalable book would be fatal to him. Very humanly he tried to escape the embarrassing situation without seeming really to do so, and he said encouragingly:

"Just send me your manuscript. My reader, Monsieur Tritou, shall at once report about it."

The epic poet looked at Monsieur Mondell with wide eyes.

"Tritou," he asked, "do you mean Aristide Tritou? Is he your reader?"

"Yes," answered Monsieur Mondell, "do you know him?"

The other sighed.

"Ah, no, I don't know him. I don't know celebrities—as yet. But of course I know all about him. Who doesn't know the author of *Loutré?* It's really the book of the year. Lafitte was lucky to get it. Everyone says that the book itself is splendid and would sell even without the illustrations by Felix."

Mondell was dumfounded. Why had that devil of a Tritou never mentioned his book? So much modesty was really too much of a virtue. But he hid his surprise and said only:

"Oh, was it Felix who did the illustrations?"

"Yes, yes," the poet assured him, "it ran serially in Kersac's *Revue Illustrée,* you know, and Felix and Kersac are intimate friends. And then the book is quite in Felix's line. Rather weird, you know, and very profound and interesting. Full of psychology—Coué, autosuggestion, subconscious-self; and folklore, imitative magic, primitive beliefs of mankind, and all such things. Quite up to date. No wonder it almost got the Prix Goncourt."

Mondell nodded sagely. "No wonder," he agreed. And shaking hands with his poet and promising anything and everything, he hurried posthaste to his office.

Monsieur Mondell hated *"les silences"*—silences that estranged and parted and that, once entered into, gained constantly in sinister power. It was well enough to be silent when you had said everything you had to say; then silence was comforting, sweet, uniting. But to be silent with an unsaid thing rankling in the mind was absolutely against his nature, and while he now made his way to his office, he decided to have it out at once with Aristide. Why had that boy been so reticent? Why, above all, if he had written a splendid book—why had he given it to another publisher? Was Pierre Lafitte really so much better an imprint than Frederic Mondell? Poor Monsieur Mondell felt slighted and was puzzled, and as he liked Aristide—liked him well enough, in fact, to quarrel violently with him—he felt, in addition, hurt. He had given his young reader full confidence and he had expected confidence in return. Well, he would hear what Aristide had to say.

He found Aristide in a cloud of tobacco smoke, leaning back in his chair, his feet on his desk, reading the galley proofs of a new Mondell publication. When Mondell entered Aristide looked up and yawned.

"Heavens, what rot," he said, "what miserable, insufferable, unendurable rot! How could you ever accept such a thing? *Building a Home*—if anyone were ever building me a home according to this book I'd kill him outright."

But Monsieur Mondell disdained to defend his new publication. He hung up his hat, seated himself in his swivel chair and, turning to Aristide, said bluntly:

"Tell me, Tritou, why did you never speak to me of *Loutré?"*

Aristide sat up in his chair and stared. Loutré? *Loutré?* What did Mondell mean? Then Aristide remembered and he became a bit embarrassed. Monsieur Mondell was of

a most scrupulous personal honesty, and Aristide doubted if he would see the fun in cheating Kersac out of a hundred francs. Aristide decided therefore that he would have to invent some excuse—he dimly thought of a lost letter or something like this—and in order to gain time he asked:

"Why should I have spoken to you of Loutré?"

Monsieur Mondell became heated and excited.

"Well, if I had written a brilliant book, the book of the year in fact, a book illustrated by Felix and run as a serial in *La Revue Illustrée,* a book finally published by Lafitte and mentioned for the Prix Goncourt, then I should have spoken to you about it. Consequently, I should have expected the same of you."

Aristide was utterly bewildered. Did Mondell jest? But no, his round moonface looked almost childishly hurt and serious. But then, what did it all mean? Had Loutré, whom he had left ignominiously in the borderland of all half-created things, hanging doubtfully between being and not-being—had Loutré, without consulting his maker, decided on a career of his own? Well, in that case he had done himself well, the old boy. Felix, Lafitte, Prix Goncourt —one could hardly better that. A self-made fiction, chuckled Aristide to himself. Well, he would not disturb Loutré in his adventurous undertaking, he would not give the show away. So, while he was highly amused inwardly, he said aloud only:

"Who told you all about Loutré, Mondell?"

"That ass of a poet did," growled Mondell, "that Lucien Dupré. Wants me to publish his epic, and when I mentioned you as my reader he started to rave. The whole literary Paris, he says, is wild about your book. The occult science in it, the folklore, primitive beliefs, imitative magic, and so on made a tremendous hit. Why you haven't offered the

book to me, Tritou, I can't understand. I always thought we were real friends."

Aristide stood up, towered over the little publisher, and said very earnestly and impressively:

"Look here, Mondell, I don't know what Dupré said; quite likely he exaggerated. I confess Loutré was an unexpected success, but I never thought for a moment that he would stir the literary Paris. But so much you can take from me—I give you my word for it: Loutré was conceived and (he winced a bit) created before I ever knew you. I assure you most solemnly I could never have offered this work to you. There was no possibility of doing so. I should be damned sorry if you thought anything else."

Mondell, whose heart although covered by layers and layers of fat was innately generous, accepted at once his friend's explanation.

"That's quite all right, Aristide," he said. "There's no ill feeling in me now. Only I'm sorry. I should have liked to bring out this book. Well, we'll see what we can do in the future."

And having thus restored peace and harmony in the office, the two went at their daily task, Aristide still smiling to himself at Loutré and Loutré's extravagant claims.

The next morning Mondell said to Aristide:

"I'll tell you what, Tritou. We are going to get a new assistant. Some young chap to write letters, and read proofs, and to do all the odds and ends of the office routine. And to you I'm going to give a little private office here and you are going to write a book for me. Of course, you can't duplicate *Loutré*—one does not write a masterwork every few months—but you'll do something fine and I'm going to bring it out in style. I'd ask F. F. to illustrate it, only he

is on his way to Japan, but we'll get Zip or Pierre Crachée to do us head and tail-pieces and perhaps even full-page drawings. Everyone will be pleased to collaborate with the author of *Loutré.*"

Aristide shrugged his shoulders and said, "Suit yourself," and while Mondell bustled round in preparation for the new arrangement, Aristide cleared his old desk and wondered dimly if he had done right to let Loutré have his way.

The new reader was soon found and Aristide began his book. It was a little extravaganza—he called it *Fairy Tales for Worldly-Wise*—and in it he told the True Story of the Loss of Paradise, the Last Visit to Eden, The Real Tragedy of Eve, and similar things. All half-gay and half-sad, all more or less queer and fantastic, yet imbued with that inner and deeper truth—*la vraie vérité* as the Goncourts say—which has the brilliant reality of all unreal things. Mondell was not displeased; now and then something appealed to him especially, but even when he said, "Fine, fine," he added invariably:

"Do you think it measures up to *Loutré?*"

Aristide, who was by this time tired and irritable, and therefore quite unreasonable, one day flared up:

"Look here, Mondell," he shouted, "you stop that. I'm fed up with Loutré. I don't want to hear anything more about him. I'm writing you the very best stuff I can—if that isn't sufficient, don't publish it."

Mondell pacified his irate friend.

"You know I like your work," he assured him again and again. "Only, of course, I'm anxious to make something really good out of it. Follow up the first great success, you know. By the way, I haven't yet read *Loutré.* Why don't you give me a copy?"

"Haven't got one," growled Aristide.

"I'll send to Lafitte for a few copies," suggested Mondell, but Tritou again became very angry.

"You'll do nothing of the kind. I'll give you the book as soon as possible. But for the present do me the one favor and forget *Loutré*. I want my new book judged on its own merits. No comparisons, if you please. If you don't accept my conditions I'll stop writing."

Peace was soon restored. Mondell promised to leave *Loutré* alone, and Aristide wrote another half dozen of his fairy tales.

The illustrations by Pierre Crachée were most delightful. Russian in coloring, bold in outline, clever in spacing, they represented quite the best work of the rising young illustrator. Mondell was well satisfied, and when finally the manuscript was all set up and the plates all done, he gave a luncheon to Aristide and Crachée, and the three drank excellent wine to the success of the new venture. At the luncheon Mondell had suddenly an idea.

"You know, Aristide," he said, "I'm going to see Kersac to-morrow and I'll ask him to write us an introduction to your new book. He brought out *Loutré* and he'll be glad to do that for you now."

Aristide had altogether too much wine to worry about anything or to argue any question.

"Let Loutré take care of himself," he thought sleepily, "I can't bother any more."

Mondell went the next morning to the offices of *La Revue Illustrée* but he did not see Kersac. The editor was ill. A treacherous and neglected spring cold had developed into pneumonia, and though the general public was not yet aware of it, at the office they all knew already that there was no

hope of Kersac's recovery. The introduction, therefore, remained unwritten.

The new book appeared and had a pleasant enough success. The reviews were mostly friendly; the somewhat conscious artistry of the charming trifles was praised, but in one *revue* it was said, "We should have expected some sterner stuff from the author of *Loutré"; whereas another young columnist began "All who have admired *Loutré* will be delighted with this new book written in the very same vein and with the same playful cleverness." Aristide chuckled when he read this. "To each man his own Loutré," he said, yet even while he laughed he felt not quite comfortable, and somehow or other he wished that he had never meddled with Loutré.

Mondell was even more gratified than Aristide with the success of *Fairy Tales for Worldly-Wise,* and began at once to plan another book that Aristide ought to write.

"The author of *Loutré,"* he said, "must keep on working."

Aristide, who had rather looked forward to a period of laziness and contemplation, was therefore forced to new labors, labors which he more or less resented and which deepened his antagonism against Loutré, whose outrageous demands for fame kept poor Tritou at the desk while the most superb spring invited every idle soul to loafing and dreaming. More than once Aristide tried to revolt and to escape, but Mondell stood over him, keeping him at his task, appealing to him in the name of *Loutré,* and in the end Aristide always had to give in. Spring ripened into summer, summer mellowed into fall, and the new book was done. In the shop-windows of the bookstores a yellow volume was displayed which bore in red and black letters the inscription: *"Vient de paraître"* "Just issued"—"A new volume by the author of *Loutré."*

On the date of publication Mondell himself came to Aristide with the first bound copy to congratulate the author and himself. And while he climbed the stairs that were leading to Aristide's little garret, he decided that now Tritou would have to look for new quarters. The author of *Loutré* ought to live in other surroundings. And after the first greetings were over, he talked at once of his new plans.

"I'll tell you, Aristide," he began, "you'll have to move. You are not any longer a Bohemian. You have a name and a reputation to keep up. People would wonder if they saw the author of *Loutré* living in such a hole. I know a splendid place for you. Myers, the American, who has a fine studio in Cours La Reine, wants to sublet. He sails for New York. I'll get his apartment and I'll install you there. It will be just the thing for you. Here, you can't receive a dog."

Aristide was not overpleased.

"It's all right here," he declared, "I like it. The view over the roofs suits me, and I never receive anybody anyhow. So what's the use of going to all this trouble?"

But Mondell was implacable.

"You have to move," he persisted. "In fact, you have to change your whole mode of living. You have already learned to work: now you have to learn to enjoy a dignified leisure, when leisure is possible. In short, my friend," he added smilingly, "you have to live up to *Loutré*."

And so again Aristide and his instincts were overruled and the change of the apartment took place.

The new apartment meant really a new life to Aristide. Mondell had arranged the place with touching and infinite care, filled the cupboard with the right kind of wine, the humidor with the right kind of cigarettes, and the numerous vases with charming flowers which were renewed twice a

week by a dependable florist. An efficient Japanese manservant kept the place in order and looked after Aristide's needs, and every morning at ten appeared a perfect stenographer to whom Aristide had to dictate until about three, with a short interruption for lunch. But Mondell had done even more. He had looked up old connections, visited long-forgotten friends, renewed relations with the conservative wing of the literary Paris—all in the interest of Aristide, who, consequently, was much invited and hardly ever had a moment to himself. Faultlessly attired, he sipped tea in numerous drawing-rooms, attended and gave intimate readings, was asked to formal dinners, and was everywhere praised and petted as the author of *Loutré* and other very delightful books. In vain did he try to push his new work in the foreground. *Loutré* was ever the center of interest, the dominating note in the symphony of flattery; and once Aristide overheard how one young writer, who also had climbed the social ladder to success, confided to another artist:

"Yes, they sell well, these Tritou-books, but frankly they are not much good. They sell on the strength of the *Loutré* success. I have not read the book myself—science is not quite my line, you know—but I hear from all sides that there is something in it. And the public is like this: if you have done one good thing, they accept afterward even poor stuff and think it's all right."

Now and then Aristide played with the idea really to write *Loutré,* but he soon found that this was utterly impossible. Loutré had grown out of his hand. He had achieved shadowy but gigantic proportions, somewhat like a djinn in a fairy tale who, once escaped out of the bottle of respectable fiction, cannot possibly be forced again into the narrow

confines of a circumscribed prison. No, Aristide decided that the question was not longer what he could do with Loutré, but rather what Loutré was going to do with him. It was a queer thought, but Aristide sometimes toyed vaguely with the fancy that Loutré had taken possession of him, body and soul, and was molding him to strange and unknown purposes; that his poor, lazy, happy-go-lucky, carefree Self had become the slave of Loutré, just as Sinbad was the slave of the Old Man of the Sea, and that whatever bodily comfort he may have gained, his spiritual freedom was lost and gone.

Mondell, of course, was quite unaware that Aristide harbored any such weird and disturbing thoughts. He was frankly delighted with the success of his protégé, and if he found the rich and fêted Aristide vastly less cheerful and far more irritable than the poor poet had been, he put it down to the erratic temperament of a genius who, having got all possible things, will still demand of fate the impossible. In fact, he admitted that this touch of disenchantment and melancholy was rather becoming to Aristide and had its market value; the more somber Tritou's little tales were, the better the public seemed to enjoy them, and Aristide's readings of his own new *contes* were always visited by the very best society. Mondell sometimes thought that it was more his manner than his matter that made Aristide so successful a lecturer. He really never read; he sat—preferably at an open fireplace—in a deep chair, or leaned against some wall or column and told his little tales in a very natural, casual, matter-of-fact way which was yet strangely effective. While he was speaking a cigarette dangled between his lean brown fingers, and—if the lights were dim enough—he punctuated his pauses by the glow of his cigarette, a glow which at certain moments had a decidedly sulphurous tang and

tinge. "Is he not more an actor than a poet?" wondered Mondell, and even mentioned one day something of this thought to Aristide. But Tritou glowered quite menacingly at his friend without vouchsafing any answer, and the topic was never more mentioned.

But whatever Aristide's special quality might have been, histrionic or poetic, he certainly had a personal appeal, and even the very exclusive club, Femina, invited him to one of its famous literary teas and gave him the very best place on the program. Mondell gratified and elated, Aristide sulky and ill-tempered, drove on the appointed day to the Avenue des Champs Elysées where the Club was housed in a distinguished little Palais. On the way Mondell commented delightedly on his friend's good fortune.

"I'll tell you, Aristide," he said, "you can be satisfied. If I think of you as you were last year—shabby, threadbare, starved, almost begging me for a position: and now, elegant, fêted, successful, the guest of Femina—it's wonderful. *Loutré* has made you."

"I guess so," granted Aristide, but he did not sound very pleased and his face did not brighten even when he stood before his very select audience and began to speak. He looked gloomily at the silken ladies and the polished gentlemen and, leaning forward in the *fauteuil* provided for him, he said to them:

"Yesterday, when the icy wind was driving frozen snowflakes over desolate-looking streets, I stepped into a little café round the corner just to warm my hands on a steaming glass of tea. And there I found at a table Satan sitting: alone, lonely, forlorn, infinitely bored. Somehow I felt impelled to speak to him, cheer him, show him some human sympathy—he really looked devilishly miserable. So I went

over to his table, offered him a cigarette, and began the usual conversation.

" 'Awful weather,' I said, 'I am frozen through and through.'

" 'Yes,' admitted Satan, 'it's pretty bad; but then, what can you expect. After all, it's winter.'

" 'For you it must be especially disagreeable,' I ventured then. 'You are accustomed to quite other temperatures.'

"Satan looked coldly at me. 'How so?' he asked.

"I stammered, embarrassed, 'Well, so far as I know, you have it pretty hot down in your place; the hellish fires, the burning sinners, and so on, that must. . . .'

"Satan interrupted me impatiently. 'It's incredible,' he exclaimed, 'the childish superstition of you people. Even you, a literary man, cultivated, enlightened, can repeat such nonsensical nursery fables. Let me assure you that you are greatly mistaken. We enjoy the most perfect climate—a subtle blending of the freshness of spring and the mild mellowness of fall. In our gardens—they are more beautiful than your limited fancy can imagine—blossom and fruit mingle on the very same tree. Our birds have the colors of rainbows and at the same time they sing with most melodious trills. And the perfume of our flowers is simply unsurpassed. Your ideas of my abode are, therefore, vastly incorrect.'

"I blushed under his reproach, but my curiosity was piqued. I wanted to know more. So I persisted. 'And the lost souls?' I asked timidly, 'the damned, what. . . .'

"He did not let me continue. He lifted his hand and his face expressed his pained disapproval. 'What words,' he sighed, 'what expressions, what crudity! Lost souls—damned—I am grieved to hear you speak like this. Our guests, as *we* call them, are made perfectly free of the place,

and whatever we can do to provide amusement and entertainment for them is done in the most elaborate manner. Concerts, theaters, dinners, art exhibitions, *bals masqués*—all this is offered in profusion. And for those with more quiet and scholarly tastes, we have libraries of rare books and manuscripts, collections of prints and etchings, anything, in short, you can imagine. We do our best to gratify every possible wish. No expense is too great.'

"I was staring with surprise. 'How wonderful!' I exclaimed; 'why that sounds more like heaven than anything else.'

"Satan seemed pleased. 'Yes, our place is an exact replica of heaven,' he confided. 'Anything you can get there we have too, and even more elegant, more elaborate, more exquisite, more subtle. Our guests get everything, just as in heaven, only—'

" 'Only—' I repeated with a vague terror clutching my heart.

" 'Only,' said Satan sadly, 'they can never, even not for one moment, forget that they are not in heaven.'

" 'And that,' I asked, 'that is—'

" 'Yes,' answered Satan wearily, 'that is it. To have everything heaven can grant you and yet not be in heaven—that's hell.'

"And while I was still pondering over these awful words he disappeared from my table."

Aristide, having finished, leaned back in his *fauteuil* and lighted his cigarette. Then he had to get up to acknowledge the applause, which was generous and spontaneous for, slight as his little tale was, his manner of delivery had been very effective, and his hearers were undoubtedly impressed. Next to Monsieur Mondell sat two ladies; the one evidently a *très grande dame*, the other equally evidently her *dame de*

compagnie, and the one, the great lady, said quite enthusiastically to Mondell:

"But he is charming, this young man. Very *spirituel* and at the same time delightfully good-looking. You know, I somehow thought all the time what a splendid figure he would make in a cinema play. He is your friend, I understand. Do bring him to me and present him."

Mondell bowed and went to fetch Aristide, and while he was on this errand he inquired discreetly who the great lady was that had been so pleased with Aristide. He was highly elated when he was told that he had spoken to Madame la Comtesse de Ségur, who was known to belong not only to the aristocracy of birth but also to the literary gentry; who, being a descendant of an old family of scholars and writers, assembled in her salon all those who possessed either a *hôtel* in the Faubourg Saint Germain or an abode on the slopes of Parnassus. Aristide was found and duly presented, and the Comtesse graciously asked him to come to tea on the very next Sunday. Then the author had to meet other guests, but Mondell stayed with the Comtesse and sang the praises of his friend.

"It will be a privilege for me, Madame," he said, "to send you those of his books which I have published. But you ought to get also his most important work, *Loutré.* Something very deep and profound. More a treatise, I should say, than a novel. Dealing with modern psychology, auto-suggestion, the subliminal self, double-personality; and also with the more occult spheres of the human mind, primitive beliefs of mankind, imitative magic, and other aspects of our subconscious life. All this grouped round the central figure of Loutré, an apache and actor at the same time. I must confess, to my shame, that I haven't read the book as yet. I always promise myself to do so, just as I promise

myself to read one day the whole *Froissart,* and the real *Don Quixote,* or Dante in the original—"

The Comtesse interrupted him laughingly:

"How I can feel with you, dear Monsieur Mondell. I am quite in the same boat. Why, I could write a book on books I mean to read. Books we all know, we all quote; books which form our mental background and are, somehow, our intellectual and spiritual property and which, in the end, come to think of it, we have really never read. But to return to your handsome friend. You did not read his book as yet, but—?"

"But I am assured from all sides," continued Mondell, "that it is something very fine. Quite a contribution to that part of our literature which is a combination of *belles lettres* and science. I am certain Madame will be greatly interested in it."

"Of course I shall be," said the Comtesse eagerly. "In fact, I am already now very much interested in book and author. Don't forget to buy *Loutré* for me before Sunday," she added, turning to her *dame de compagnie.* "You'll get it at Brentano's, without doubt."

And then all conversation stopped, because "by request" Aristide had to tell another little tale.

The Comtesse received Aristide on Sunday with a warm cordiality which made him feel at once very much at home.

"I have nobody else for tea but you, Monsieur Tritou," she said, "because I am an intellectual *gourmet.* Cheap wines you mix with mineral water, you soften the bitterness of vermouth and the roughness of gin with *fleur d'oranger* and sugar and other ingredients and get a cocktail; but if a rare vintage is offered to you you want it pure, unmixed, by itself, to enjoy the exquisite flavor. So no other guests but you to-day. I had my nephew at dinner but I sent him

away. I want to talk to you and of you and of your work. You did get *Loutré* for me, didn't you, Constance?"

The *dame de compagnie,* who was pouring tea, felt terror-stricken. She had forgotten all about that miserable book. But it would never do to confess. The Comtesse would be furious. So, leaving quickly her teacups, she said:

"Why, certainly, madame. I bought it yesterday, and I put it on this little table together with the new *Revue des Deux Mondes.*"

Aristide looked at the indicated table with a kind of wondering awe. He would hardly have been surprised if the book had really been there. By now everything seemed possible to him. But the table was conspicuously empty.

"I can't understand it," said Mademoiselle Constance. "I saw the books myself this morning. Three volumes—aren't there three, Monsieur Tritou?—all beautifully bound. I don't know who can have taken it."

"Perhaps my nephew got hold of it," smiled the Comtesse. "He may have looked into it and, reading a few lines, found the temptation too strong, and took it with him. Quite a compliment to you, Monsieur Tritou. But we will not sorrow over the book as long as we have the author. In fact, I think, Monsieur Tritou, you should present a copy to me, perhaps even one with a nice inscription—"

"Madame," interrupted Aristide, and his voice had a ring of sincerity which pleased the Comtesse, "Madame, nothing could give me greater pleasure than to offer you this book if it were only possible. But alas, we authors are negligent people. I do not possess a single copy. And as to buying it—" he shrugged his shoulders eloquently. "Mademoiselle performed a miracle in getting it. I doubt if there is another copy in all Paris."

Constance, who was happy over the turn the affair had taken, corroborated Aristide eagerly.

"Yes, madame," she explained, "I had a very hard time getting that work. Brentano's were all out of it. At last I found it in a little bookshop in the Palais Royale. Evidently it is out of print."

"Yes," continued Aristide, "It is out of print, and if I ever regretted that fact I regret it to-day."

"Why, no," chided the Comtesse, "You should be proud that a work of this type has sold so well. You'll present to me then the first copy of the second edition."

"The second edition," sighed Aristide. "I wish I could see it already. But you know, madame, how publishers are. And then, again, you cannot blame them. Bookmaking is a costly luxury nowadays. Now there is my friend Mondell—"

"Ah, yes, Monsieur Mondell," remembered the Comtesse. "He was good enough to send me your other books, and I am truly grateful to him. I enjoyed immensely your *Fairy Tales for Worldly-Wise*. Do read me 'Blue Roses' once more. I think that's my favorite."

The Comtesse, who was not far from fifty, had no illusions about herself. She knew that she was no longer young, and she said sometimes with a wry smile:

"I am the most dismal creature in the world. I am a charming woman who does not charm any more."

But though she had lost the form and features of Youth, all the eagerness, the enthusiasm, the quick perceptions of a young heart and mind were still hers; and however disagreeable she could be as an enemy, just so delightful and helpful she was as a friend. And to Aristide she became

at once a very loyal and devoted friend. She liked him unreservedly though she chided him incessantly.

"You see," she explained to him, "there are people who are excellent in every detail. I approve of every trait in them; they have the right opinions, they do the right things, they even have the right manners. Yet, on the whole and taking it all in all, I have no use for them. And then again there are others who constantly irritate me; who in every detail of their personality annoy me and make me angry; who never do what I expect them to do, never say what I wish to hear, never even behave as I think it right to behave. And yet, on the whole and taking it all in all, they are the people I care for, the people I want, the ones I am truly fond of. You, Aristide, belong to this class. You annoy me extremely, yet I like you nevertheless. And because I like you I tell you frankly you waste your time. You are more than a writer: you are a scholar, a scientist. You know the hidden recesses of the human mind, the dim past of the human race. Instead of cynical, playful little things —be they as charming as they may—you ought to write for us works of abiding value. Monumental things. But you are abominably lazy."

Aristide looked up from his teacup with which he was playing and asked with a queer smile:

"Whoever told you, *chère amie,* that I am a scholar and a scientist? Perhaps you are mistaken in this assumption."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Comtesse sharply. "The author of *Loutré* is a scholar and a scientist. Don't pretend to me. Only, as I say and the more's the pity, you are a negligent creature. But I am going to take care of you; I am going to find for you the right place and the proper career."

Aristide lifted his hands in mock terror.

"Have pity," he groaned, "let me off easy. Whatever you do, don't make me a professor. I'd balk at that."

"But why?" persisted the Comtesse. "You'd make an excellent professor. You look so delightfully pictorial. We could send you as an exchange professor to America and you'd marry an heiress. Wouldn't you like that?"

"No," said Aristide decidedly, "not at all. But then, I am never permitted to do what I like. I lead a life that is utterly distasteful to me. Well, what's the difference?"

"None at all," the Comtesse assured him. "If you were leading the life you dream of, you would abhor it equally. Things look pleasant only from afar. The charm of distance lends them grace and color and beauty. But when we come near we find the same sordidness, the same dullness, the same gray and intolerable boredom. Let me tell you a little thing that happened to me the other day. It sounds just like one of your tales. You could have written it. I was shopping and I went through one of the side streets. I think it was the Rue Taitbout. And there in a shop window I saw the most delicious string of beads. The color was a mystical deep green, the carving fantastic and weird yet full of harmony, the whole thing breathing the charm, the fragrance, the elusiveness of the Orient. I felt I had to get that string of beads; they were at that moment the one supreme desire of my soul. Entering the shop, I found quite an old man at the counter, and I explained to him what I wanted. Well, he took a shabby box from one of the shelves, and in it there were string on string of beads. But they all looked miserably cheap and vulgar and commonplace. 'No,' I said, 'I don't want these. My chambermaid wouldn't wear them. They are horrid. I want the one you have in your shop window.' He assured me most earnestly that he was showing me the very same beads as

those I had admired, but I could not believe him. At last he opened the glass case and handed me the string I had seen. And he was right, my friend. Holding my treasure in my hand, I perceived how cheap and miserable and undesirable it was. 'How is that possible?' I asked him embarrassed. 'They looked so very different to me.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'Perhaps the glass did it,' he suggested, and I saw in a flash that he was right. It is the glass, the glass of illusion, that makes the things in the shop window of life appear so utterly desirable. But if, God forbid, we ever get what we desire, if our wishes are ever fulfilled, then we see how valueless, how poor, how mean all these treasures are, and we are more bitterly disappointed than those who have wished in vain. So you see, my friend, that I am justified in not consulting your wishes at all. I am going to do what is good for you, and not what you like, for, come to think of it, there is nothing to like in this disenchanted world of ours."

The Comtesse was as good as her word. Without consulting Aristide in the least, she looked round to find something really worth while for him, a position adequate to his great gifts, in which she believed implicitly. And the gods were evidently with her. At a Lenten gathering she met Monsieur Du Fayel, a rich industrialist who, having retired, had become interested in the more abstruse realms of psychology and literature, and whose ambition it was to create in Nancy, his birthplace, a very dignified monthly magazine, which should bear the name *Revue Du Fayel.* He confided his plans to the Comtesse, who listened to him with delighted interest, and when he added:

"You know, madame, I want it to be something very exquisite. Very literary and yet truly scientific. A cross,

so to say, between the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the *Hibbert Journal.*"

"Wonderful, wonderful!" she exclaimed enthusiastically, "and by sheer good luck I have just the man who will edit to perfection this particular magazine."

"Really?" said Monsieur Du Fayel, interested, "and who is he?"

"His name," answered the Comtesse, "is Aristide Tritou. He writes, as a hobby, very charming and clever little sketches, and fairy tales and playlets of quite impeccable style. But his real achievement is *Loutré,* a work of three large volumes. I should call it the French equivalent of Frazer's *Golden Bough.* Of course it's out of print. All good things are. To-day I wanted to buy the *Journal des Goncourt.* Impossible. I couldn't get a copy for love nor money. So it is with *Loutré.* You can't buy it, but Mondell, the publisher—you know him, don't you? He is a most conservative man, and *so* careful in his statements—well, Mondell told me it is a masterwork. Grouped around the figure of Loutré, an actor and apache, are all the occult beliefs of primitive mankind: imitative magic, tree-worship, priesthood of kings—or is it kinghood of priests? I am never quite certain—and so on and so forth. And then, developed out of this foundation, the modern psychology in all its intricacies: the subconscious self, metempsychosis, autosuggestion, Coué, of course—Coué is a Nancy man, so that must interest you especially—faith healing, and what not. If you can get Monsieur Tritou to be your editor you will have a find. If you want me to, I can arrange a meeting with him for you."

Monsieur Du Fayel was very well pleased with this idea.

"I shall be truly grateful to you, Comtesse," he said. "If

this Monsieur Tritou and I take to each other and he is willing to come to Nancy, the thing can be settled very soon."

The meeting was arranged, the two men liked each other, and the editorship of the *Revue Du Fayel* was offered to Aristide. He was loth to accept and made many excuses.

"My dear man," he said to Du Fayel, "you are foolhardy. You offer me a splendid salary, a responsible position—I understand you want to give me an entire free hand—and yet you do not know the least thing about me. I might be a fraud, or worse. Better look out."

But Du Fayel merely laughed.

"The Comtesse de Ségur vouches for you, and in speaking to you I formed my own impressions. That's enough. I wish you would take the job. Nancy, of course, is not Paris, but you'll be compensated by the standing you will have in the community. So better think it over and let me know in a day or two."

To the Comtesse, Aristide was even more outspoken in his refusal.

"I can't," he said. "There are a thousand reasons why I can't, but above all, I don't want to leave Paris. Paris is my love, my delight, the joy of my heart. I adore the air here, the crowds in the street, the *quais* and the boulevards, the parks and the Bois. Come to think of it, I adore you too, *chère amie*. So why shall I give all this up and bury myself in Nancy?"

"To be worthy of *Loutré*," said the Comtesse. "Anyhow, don't let's discuss it. You are going to accept. I have decided that and I know what is good for you. This position is a godsend, Aristide. It will absolutely make you. One

day you'll be grateful to me. So don't let me hear any more of your nonsense."

But most vehement was Aristide to Mondell.

"Damn it," he shouted at him, "I am not going to be bullied by you and a meddlesome old woman. Nancy, of all places in God's world! Nancy, and to be an editor there! I always hated editors. Insufferable lot, all of them. And in addition to all that, editor of such a magazine! What do I know about the subject?"

Mondell laughed heartily.

"That's good," he said, "you, the author of *Loutré,* you ask what you know about the subject. Well, my dear boy, what you don't know about it isn't worth knowing, and old Du Fayel can't find anyone better for the place. So don't rave any more. Be sensible and thank your stars."

In the end Aristide had to give in. A tentative agreement was arrived at; Monsieur Du Fayel instructed his lawyers to draw up the formal contracts, and the Comtesse arranged that the actual signing of these contracts, which would be ready in about a week's time, should take place in her salon. She intended to have a select gathering for this occasion, and to play for once Mæcenas in real style. Aristide—whom the Comtesse treated quite as a fractious child whom she had made behave—Aristide did not protest at anything any more, but be looked gloomy enough when he left the hotel of the Comtesse, and when Mondell offered to walk home with him he refused curtly. No, not even a good quarrel with Mondell would cheer him. He wandered alone and moodily through the streets, his coat open to the first breezes of spring, the refrain of an old couplet of Désaugiers persistently haunting him, so that he repeated over and over again:

"Adieu bonheur,
Ma fortune est faite."

Suddenly Aristide perceived that he had wandered into the neighborhood of the Trois Couronnes.

"God," he exclaimed, "now I know what I want. I want to get drunk. The Trois Couronnes, that's the place for me."

Entering the restaurant, he found it almost empty—the hour was so ridiculously early—but there in one corner was some one sitting. Aristide went over and saw with pleasure that the lonely guest, half asleep over his *petit noir,* was Charles Morissey. He slapped him on the shoulder and said laughingly:

"Charley, Charley old boy, wake up! We both must get drunk to-day."

Charles looked up.

"Aristide," he asked in astonishment. "What brings you here? You, who, since you're famous, have forgotten us, neglected us, cut us dead—what do you want here?"

Aristide sank into a chair.

"Don't preach, Charley," he said. "You're an ass. You know nothing. I can't cut anybody because I am not I any more. I don't belong to myself. Anyhow, what's the difference? Just shut up and drink with me. Is there any champagne in this place? Let's have it. All of it. Twice as much. Get that waiter over there and let him make it snappy."

Charles could not resist such an invitation. The champagne was brought and after the first few glasses all differences, all hurts, all slights were forgotten. Charles and Aristide were the pals of old, and laughed and talked as in former times. The waiter came over with the *carte du jour,*

but Aristide waved him away. He did not want to eat, he wanted to drink.

"More champagne," he ordered, and when the bottles were brought he said to Charles:

"Listen, Charley, let's mix it. With absinthe. Tastes fine. Has the right kick in it. Tell that waiter to bring it. Let him shake a leg. He's as slow as a snail."

The absinthe came and the friends toasted each other. Charles wanted to talk shop, to inquire about Aristide's work, but Aristide bade him to keep quiet.

"No literature," he declared. "I want to have a good time. We'll make a night of it. Go over and play something on that darned old piano. Let's sing something."

Arm in arm they went over to the piano and soon their voices mingled in their favorite song:

"In the castle of Gradesco
By the town of Temesvar
Sat the valiant Prince Bibesco,
Servia's great old Hospodar.

Say, what did the Prince Bibesco,
Servia's great old Hospodar
In the castle of Gradesco
By the town of Temesvar?

Slivovitz drank Prince Bibesco
In the castle of Gradesco
By the town of Temesvar
Till he could not see a star."

"Slivovitz," repeated Aristide, "why shouldn't we have Slivovitz too. Great idea. Tell that waiter to bring Slivovitz."

The order was given, but the waiter came back with regrets.

"We have no Slivovitz, monsieur," he reported. "We have Benedictine, Chartreuse, Dubonnet, Crême de Menthe—"

"All right, all right," interrupted Aristide, "bring it, bring it."

"What, monsieur?" inquired the waiter.

"Everything," decided Aristide.

The waiter shrugged his shoulders. Monsieur was evidently not quite right in his head. But he returned with Benedictine and Chartreuse. Yet at the same time he presented the bill. Aristide paid but he was angry.

"What a place," he groaned, "what a miserable place. I am annoyed. I am excessively annoyed. Let's get out of here, Charley, and go to some decent café. I want a glass of beer. I am very thirsty. A glass of beer will be the best thing for us."

The café was found, the glass of beer was drunk and followed by more and more glasses of beer, and in the end Charles suggested that he had better return home. Berthe would wonder where he stayed so long. But Aristide did not want to hear of it.

"Let Berthe wonder if she wants to," he said. "You come with me. You have never seen my place. I want you to come now. I'll take a *fiacre*. I am not drunk but I am tired. Can't walk well. We'll be there in no time."

Charles was easily persuaded. Berthe would be angry anyway, so he might as well hang for an ox as for a sheep. And he wanted to see Aristide's place. So the *fiacre* was called and the friends were driving through the mild night toward Cours La Reine. On the way Aristide wondered that he was not drunk at all. His legs were

heavy, his words did not come quite easily, but his mind was entirely clear. In fact, clearer than ever. He saw all things with a strange lucidity; he understood himself and fate and life ever so much better than ever before. To be sure, he could not talk well, and walking was a nuisance, but the riddle of the universe held no more mysteries for him. He was insight and wisdom personified. He knew all things and, knowing them, he disliked them.

They arrived at the studio, dismissed their *fiacre,* mounted the stairs, and entered the apartment. Charles was deeply impressed.

"Wheew, Aristide," he whistled, "what a place! What a place! You do yourself well."

Aristide had switched on the lights, filled two glasses with liqueur, taken out the cigarettes, and, having thus fulfilled all duties of hospitality, found a big chair in which he settled himself.

"Yes, I guess it's all right," he said, "only I liked my old place better. That view over the roofs of the big city, that was great. And my old desk just at the window, and from my couch I could see the young moon and the morning star. Here—well, here all is soft and pillowy and artistic. Hate it like hell."

Charles was surprised.

"If you don't like it, Aristide, why do you keep this place?"

Aristide shrugged his shoulders.

"Why? Search me. I don't know. Ask Loutré. Take these cigarettes for instance. Dimitrinos. Don't like them either. They're bitter. Petit Caporal taste ever so much nicer. But Dimitrinos are expensive, they are in style. So I have to have them. Loutré, you know. He makes me do all these things. Damn Loutré!"

Charles took it all as a joke.

"Well," he said laughingly, "you ought not to damn him, even though your tastes disagree. He really made you. Thanks to Loutré, you're famous."

"Yes," admitted Aristide, "it's true. I'm famous and he made me. Funny. Could make a comedy out of it. All the work I did, all the books I wrote did not bring me as much fame as the one thing I never wrote at all."

Charles sat up. The fumes of alcohol were somewhat clearing from his brain and he was staring his surprise.

"What!" he exclaimed, "you did not write *Loutré?*"

"No," Aristide assured him, "not a line of it."

"But then—then—who wrote that book?" demanded Charles excitedly.

Aristide again shrugged his shoulders.

"S'far as I know," he said, "nobody ever did."

Charles was dumfounded.

"Then the whole *Loutré* thing is a fake?"

Aristide grimaced.

"Why fake?" he said, "ugly word, fake. Hate it. No, not fake exactly. Different. Legend perhaps. Yes, that's it. Legend. Loutré's a legend, coming out of some dim beginnings and growing, and growing, and growing."

He sat for a while silently and smoked, and Charles, who did not quite understand, and who was too drunk to care greatly, dozed in his chair. Suddenly Aristide looked up and said:

"Tell me, Charley, who told you first of *Loutré?*"

Charles tried to remember.

"Who told me first of *Loutré?*" he repeated. "Let me see. Why, Berthe did. Ever so long ago. She came home one evening, I think it was in November a year ago. Had met F. F. on the street and was raving mad. He had

told her about *Loutré* and his illustrations and the *Revue Illustrée* and Lafitte and so on. And she could not forgive me your success."

Aristide thought deeply.

"Well, of course," he decided at last, "I can't make it out in all the details. But it's likely that Kersac told something to Felix—I remember I met Felix when I came from Kersac—and Felix told a little more to Berthe, and Berthe a little more to you, and so on and so on. In this way Loutré was growing. Legend—just as I said."

"But," persisted Charles, "what could Kersac have told to Felix?"

"Loutré, of course," Aristide said impatiently.

"Loutré?" asked Charles bewildered. "But you said you did not do *Loutré.*"

"Nonsense," growled Aristide, "I said I did not write that damned stuff. For mercy's sake, Charles, don't be such an ass. Try to understand. I was dead broke at that time. I had not a sou. Went to Kersac to get some money. If I had asked him outright he would have kicked me out. So I told him Loutré. He gave me a hundred francs for it. He was the first one to believe in Loutré, to be impressed by him. That was the beginning."

Again he fell into his musing silence, and Charles, who did not know what to make out of all these confessions, did not disturb him; in fact, he almost fell asleep. But just when his eyes became really heavy, Aristide startled him with the question:

"Tell me, Charley, are you superstitious?"

Charles considered the proposition.

"Oh, I don't think so," he yawned. "I pride myself . . ."

"Pride yourself nothing," interrupted Aristide. "Don't talk rot. Of course you're superstitious. We all are. We

live by our superstitions and die of them. Fear, sin, conscience—in the end nothing but the superstition of Taboo. Family, country, patriotism—superstition of the Totem. Superstition wherever you look. Racial superstitions ingrained into us from prenatal days and personal superstitions acquired or perhaps remembered from some weird nursery tale or the shadowy corner of an unfamiliar room. You've got it as well as all of us. Counting cobblestones. Looking for odd and even numbers. Touching wood, and what not."

Again he fell silent, but after a while he spoke out of the depth of his chair:

"You know, Charley, I always had, from the days of my childhood, a very personal superstition. Funny kind at that.—Remember how kids sometimes draw faces—a round circle, two eyes, a nose, a mouth?—well, I always had a kind of shudder when I looked at these things. Gave me the creeps. Rubbed them out whenever I could. For somehow I had the dim feeling that in creating a form you created at the same time—"

"A soul?" asked Charles.

"Not exactly a soul, but a spiritual power, or perhaps only an influence; at any rate, something that was there, that could work, could hurt perhaps, could do things. Sounds queer, I know, but I felt that way. Think the old Jews felt like it when they forbade making pictures and statues. They knew something of occult things, got the knowledge from ancient Egypt, and they were afraid—afraid of the spiritual equivalent of the material form. Knew it was dangerous to meddle with such things. And everywhere through the whole history of mankind you will find hints that point in this direction. Interrelation between matter and spirit. One, in fact, expresses the other. If matter

becomes articulate it is spirit; if spirit becomes visible it is form. Create then a form and you create power. Well, in a way, that's just what I did with Loutré."

He tossed his cigarette away, lit a new one and wandered through the room.

"In the end," he said, "the thing resolves itself to this: Who is the creature and who the creator? Did I make Loutré or did Loutré make me? I guess, more or less, he made me, is making me constantly. Changing me! I am not I any more. I'm the author of *Loutré*. I have to lead a life that's pleasing to Loutré; I write for the greater fame of Loutré, and now I'll have to renounce Paris, and joy, and the carefree pleasures of youth, just to go to Nancy and edit a magazine for the greater glory of Loutré."

He paused again, stood at the window and looked out. Then, turning round, he said:

"Listen, Charley, sometimes I think that primitive man played once with the idea of an Invisible Being, of God, just as I played with the idea of Loutré. And then this spiritual power thus created grew and grew and became stronger and stronger and made man, who is but little more than an ape, do strange, unheard-of, unpredictable things: things glorious, heroic, and ridiculous; things which are really not in the nature nor in the power of man to do and which he yet accomplishes for the greater glory of a god he created."

Charles Morissey held his head.

"Oh, Aristide," he groaned, "I wish you would not say such things. They sound bad, unholy, blasphemous. What does it help you to have thoughts like these?"

"In a way it does," insisted Aristide, "takes me out of the loneliness of my personal experience and connects me with the fate of the race; makes the little storm in my life

part of the 'vast driftings of the cosmic weather.' After all, that's what Time is really there for. To connect us with Eternity. Time's a wayside station. Dull, uninteresting, dirty, noisy, disappointing. But now and then, if you happen to strike the propitious hour, you can make there a connection with Eeternity."

Again a deep silence fell. Aristide had regained his chair; he leaned back and looked long and dreamily at the ceiling. "If I had only written down *Loutré,*" he began again, "nothing would have happened. Things put into words are harmless, innocuous. The original idea, the inspiration, is full of passion, fire, urge, power. But when you put it into words, write it down on paper, it gets chilled, weakened, emasculated. Loutré put into the confines of a story, into the prison of a printed page, couldn't have done anything. But I was too lazy. Had all the money to spend. So I let it go. And he was there, with the original push and urge undiminished in him, starting out on his own hook. And going on, and on, and on."

Charles jumped up.

"Why, that's insane, Aristide," he cried; "what can he do? He does not live."

Aristide showed his impatience.

"Don't be an ass, Charles. He lives as well as you do. Perhaps in a different way, but quite as alive. And he does exactly what you do. If you want some one to lend you money, or to bring you this or that, or to do you a favor—you don't use physical force, do you? You impress the mind of this person—you make him believe in you. Well, that's just what Loutré does. Impresses the mind. People believe in him, do things for him and on account of him. Everything in which one believes is alive. Dead gods are gods in which no one believes any more."

"People believe in the devil," said Charles quite irrelevantly.

"Well, perhaps Loutré is a devil," agreed Aristide. "Not Lucifer in person, but one of the minor devils, with a terrible lust for power and a great appetite for all good things in life—comfort, riches, society, position. And because he likes them, I've got to get them. Yes, that explains Loutré very well. A minor devil."

"Malignant?" asked Charles.

Aristide considered that.

"Malignant? No. Not exactly. Not if he is not thwarted in his purposes. But when something stands in his way, then, I think—ruthless. Yes, ruthless, that's the word. Does not care what he does. Did for poor Kersac."

Charles almost screamed his denial.

"Insane," he shouted, "insane. Kersac died of pneumonia. He had influenza, then a complication set in and he had no strength left to throw off the virus. Perfectly natural."

"Yes," said Aristide, "but why should he have no strength left? Why should complications set in? Other people get well. I tell you Loutré did it. Mondell wanted to talk to Kersac about him. I should have prevented him, but I was tired. And Mondell is such a mule. You have to argue, and argue, and argue before he gives in. So I thought: Let Loutré take care of himself. Well, he did—in his way. Could not afford, of course, to have it known that he is only the fiction of a fiction—the shadow of a shade. Wonder if he'll ever let F. F. return from Japan?"

Charles' head was whirling. All the drinks, and on top of it these revelations, it was too much.

"Aristide," he begged, "tell me that you were just fooling me; that you made simply a rotten joke. A joke I almost believed in. But if you did not jest, if it's true, if you're

really in the power of that Thing, that Loutré, why don't you cast him off, denounce him, deny him and get free?"

Aristide shook his head.

"Too late," he said. "If I had spoken at once, then it could have been a hoax; but now—now it's too much of a mess. Then consider, Charley: all I have, all I possess is really Loutré's. Denouncing him means to give it all up. That's not easy. The fleshpots of Egypt, you know. I'm enslaved.

"Of course I have still some spiritual reservations left. I have never really confessed to—I would almost say professed—Loutré. I just let him have his way. Never said directly anything that would strengthen his position. But I know myself that it's only a subterfuge. Matter of time. Sooner or later—he'll drive me more and more into a corner—then the last shred of the old Aristide will be gone."

Charles Morissey almost cried with vexation.

"You make me sick, Aristide," he protested, "saying such awful things. Impious, utterly impious. . . . But of course it's all nonsense. There are no—what did you call them?—spiritual influences. Minor devils. We live in the twentieth century. Who'll believe such things nowadays?"

"All right, all right," answered Aristide. "I'll put it for you in twentieth-century language, if you insist. Then Loutré is not a devil outside of me but in me. Split personality, you know. You remember the case of Miss Beauchamp and Sally B? There is Loutré and I. Part of the same Ego, yet antagonistic to each other, each with a different set of preferences, views, demands upon life, and so on. And he, the Invader, becomes ever stronger and stronger. Crowds me out, in fact. Has things his own way more and more. Why, he invades me even physically. Changes my appearance. People used to say that I looked

typically the poet. Now everybody thinks I am or ought to be an actor. Loutré, you see. Playing the master in the house. And soon he'll have me crushed down altogether, and the *I* you knew, the *I* that still tries to persist will be submerged—gone forever. Well, what's the difference? Things are as they are."

Another silence fell. This time it was Charles who broke it.

"Listen, Aristide," he began solemnly, "what you told me this night is sacred to me. I shall never tell anyone a word about it—"

Aristide interrupted him with a mocking laughter.

"Of course not, Charley," he said. "I know you'll keep your mouth shut. Anyhow, you'd better. Loutré might not like it if you told on him, and if I were you I should not care to meddle with him, whatever he may be. Swift vengeance, you know. Well, what did you want to say?"

"I wanted to say," continued Charles disconcertedly, "that I implore you to tell the whole truth, to make a public confession. That I pray you to purge your soul, to get rid of the sinister power which got hold of you. That I abjure you to do penance before it is too late."

"Well, I'll see, I'll see," yawned Aristide. "Anyhow it's too late to discuss anything any more. I'll give you a shake-down on my couch. You can't go home now. Berthe will never let you in. Let's go to sleep, old boy, and I hope that Loutré will not haunt you in your dreams."

When Aristide awoke the next day and found Charles Morissey still sleeping on his couch, he wondered what had possessed him to spend such a night with an old friend whom he had decidedly outgrown. He must really have been drunk—much more drunk than he had imagined himself to be, or he would not have told Charley all he did tell.

Not that he was afraid Charles would gossip—he knew him too well for that—but it was disagreeable to face him after all the revelations of the night before. Charles would surely not have sense enough to disregard their talk or to treat it as something entirely unrelated to the usual run of things—there were hardly any people in the world who had this spiritual tact. Most of them, all of them in fact, pinned you down to the consequences of a passing mood and, having been intimate with them for one moment, you were committed to be intimate with them for the rest of your life.

What a miserable proposition! Aristide shuddered at the idea of continuing any personal talk. Therefore he dressed quietly, told his Japanese man to make coffee for his guest as soon as he should awake, and went out leaving a note for Charles, excusing himself with an appointment and promising to see him soon again. Well, he would take good care that soon should not be so very soon. He only hoped that Charles would be gone before he returned. On second thought he added a postscript to his note, saying, "Don't wait for me. Might be late."

Charles did not wait. He left, but before he left he penned a line to Aristide which read, "Good-by. I implore you to follow my advice."

Aristide, coming home and seeing this message, was annoyed. What a presuming ass, this Charles! Follow my advice! As if anybody could possibly advise anybody else! In the depths of our being always strangers, misunderstanding one another on all points, and yet offering advice—preposterous! Only human beings could be quite so fatuous and silly. No lion in God's world advises another lion as to his duties in the animal kingdom; no tiger advises another tiger to curb his appetite and let not the lust of blood run

away with him. Beasts were satisfied to follow the law of their nature and to rest there. Beasts had dignity. But man, in his sick and swollen vanity, goes and advises. Aristide considered writing an article on this. The first sentence formed itself in his head: "If you want to follow my advice, don't follow anybody's advice." He winced. Awful. Journalese. Cheap. Why, for heaven's sake, was he always tempted to write cheap things, make cheap jokes? Once upon a time he had had other dreams. Well, better not think about once-upon-a-time. He went to bed and slept the dead sleep of utter oblivion.

In the next few days Aristide pondered over his problem and could not find any way out. He was sick of everything, he wanted to tell and to get out of all complications; yet at the same time some part in him—the Loutré-part he thought, remembering his talk with Charles—some part of him decided that it was impossible to speak, that he had to go on and let things shape themselves as they would. And, indeed, it was difficult. What could he tell? The truth? But what exactly was the truth? And to whom could he tell it? Mondell? Reminding him of the day when he had come to the office and stating the facts as they had developed? Impossible. Mondell would never understand. He would see a common fraud in something which was really quite different, something ever so much more complicated. Mondell was a splendid fellow but he lacked imagination. He would never understand the intangible influences that had dominated Aristide. The Comtesse would have more the instinct for these doubtful and difficult things, yet to speak to her was also an appalling task. To explain to somebody else what one could only in an hour of drunkenness, of vanished inhibitions, explain somehow to oneself was almost impossible.

What he would have to say in bald words would amount to this: I have fooled you all. There is no Loutré. Yet again, was there really no Loutré? Granted that Loutré was merely an idea—well, but it was his idea, his creation. That he had not made a book out of this idea was a mere accident. Why make so much fuss about that accident? The whole thing was rotten. Awful mess. He wished it had never happened. Yet what could he do now? There was really nothing to do. Confess? Repent? He sneered in his thoughts at Morissey's moral attitude. What a fool Charles was; what a bigger fool he himself for having told Charles! It was bad enough to be bothered by one's own conscience, but to be bothered in addition by the conscience of somebody else was worse. And above all, Charles's. How he had outgrown him and the whole crowd of the Trois Couronnes! He could never return to them and lead the old life any more. Just as little as Loutré could return to his former life. Funny—he had not written *Loutré* but he had lived him. Was Loutré himself. Perhaps one could start a "confession" from this point. Make it the beginning of some kind of explanation. Though, God knows, it would be a tough proposition. Damnably hard. Well, hard or not, he would have to tell Mondell. No, he would rather tell the Comtesse. To-morrow. Go up quite casually and just tell it as one tells an anecdote. A good joke. A bad joke, rather. Yes, to-morrow. That was decided. Nothing more to think about it.

But, began a small and insinuating voice in him, was it really quite fair to his friends, who had shown him nothing but the most unselfish kindness, to trouble them, hurt them, worry them? If that Loutré affair was a burden, why not carry that burden silently and alone? He hated to go to Nancy. He hated to be an editor. He wanted to live in

Paris—gay, carefree, irresponsible, writing little fantastic things and amusing himself in his own solitary way. Well, then he would atone for whatever he had failed by foregoing his preferences and leading the life that was expected of him. When he came so far in his reasoning he got furious. "That's Loutré," he shouted to himself. "Tries to get round me this way. I'll fool him yet. I'm going to tell."

But the days passed and he did not tell. In fact, he kept away from Mondell as well as from the Comtesse till the time arrived when the contract with Monsieur Du Fayel had to be signed. "I'll tell them then and there," decided Aristide while he dressed to go to the Comtesse. "When they are all assembled, I'll tell them. Plain out."

But he felt very miserable and somehow he did not believe in himself any more. He found more guests than he had expected at the Comtesse's house. Academicians, writers, artists, men of finance and business, and he felt it was impossible for him to make a scene in these surroundings and under these circumstances. Moodily he stood round, answering absent-mindedly flattering remarks addressed to him, wondering what to do, wondering if there was still anything he could do. And suddenly the spirit of the old Aristide awakened in him, the old Aristide who had always found a way out, who had been equal to every emergency of the moment; a gay scoundrel, happy, carefree, and resourceful; infinitely more human than the new, rich, famous Aristide who had everything heaven could grant and yet was not in heaven. And this old Aristide whispered to him, "Why not clear out? Just simply go away without any explanation, without any confession, without any fuss, leaving Loutré and the others to deal with this disappearance as well as they could?" Aristide flushed with pleasure at the idea. God, why had he not sooner thought of this?

Why not sooner found this escape? A word came into his mind—Touraine—and he had in a flash the vision of a clear blue sky, the fresh winds of heaven, green young things scenting the air with the breath of spring, the murmurs of running water, and he himself wandering, free and unfettered once more, wherever his fancy led him. Clear out—that was the thing! There lay his salvation. He moved toward the door of the salon, gained the next room, and was reaching the hall when he was confronted by the Comtesse who, following a strange impulse, just as if somebody had warned her of some danger, had left everything and everybody and had hurried after him.

"Aristide," she said anxiously, "what are you doing here? You cannot absent yourself. The contract is going to be signed right now. Don't play the fool. Come back with me. I want to introduce you to a score of people."

Aristide stood still. The light went out of his face. Well, he was trapped, he couldn't do anything. Sullenly he turned round and followed the Comtesse, and while he did so he muttered to an unseen presence:

"All right, all right. I give in. You win, I lose. Game's over."

He bowed right and left in a somewhat mechanical fashion, and went at last obediently to the table at which the lawyers and Monsieur Du Fayel were already seated, and to which the Comtesse was proudly guiding her protégé. When Aristide held the fountain pen in his hand he realized fully that he had been beaten. There was nothing more to do. His invisible adversary had triumphed. He had to surrender, and his surrender was complete, final, irrevocable. With a kind of desperate flourish he signed his contract: Aristide Tritou, Author of *Loutré*.

REDBONE

By

Ada Jack Carver

IT is lazy and sweet along the Côte Joyeuse and on into the piney red-clay hills—a land which for nearly four hundred years has been held enthralled by a river. And here among the whites and blacks there dwell in ecstatic squalor a people whom, in the intricate social system of the South, strangers find it difficult to place. For although they may be bartered with, jested with, enjoyed, despised, made friends and enemies of—yet in the eyes of those born to the subtle distinction they are forever beyond the pale.

They are a mixture of Spanish, French, and Indian, and God only knows what besides; and along the Côte Joyeuse, a region given to phrase and to fable, they are dubbed "redbones" because of their dusky skins so oddly, transparently tinted. They are shiftless and slovenly, childlike and treacherous; and yet from somewhere, like a benediction, they have been touched with something precious.

Of this hybrid and tragic tribe was Baptiste Grabbo, planter, and his the story of a man who desired and obtained a son.

One summer morn at a peep-o-day hour this Baptiste set out for Natchitoches, riding his little red pony. His mission was threefold: first, of course, to get drunk; second, to make a thank-offering to his patron saint, whose business it was to look after him and who did it rather well, all things considered; third, in accordance with a cus-

tom that still prevails, to purchase in tribute a gift for his wife, who had been delivered of a fine and lusty son—a man-child born in the crook of a horned moon and destined for great good fortune.

Baptiste rode hard, like a centaur. Above him the frail enchantment of budding clematis filled the woods with light and, reflecting on his fortune, he recalled complacently the insults and insinuations with which since his marriage his relatives had derided his childless estate. Bah! He would make 'em swallow their words, the yellow chinquapin-eaters! He accursed of Heaven?

The glory of fatherhood gave him a heart atune to the tumult of summer. There were flowers purple with adoration praying in the grass; wings brushed his cheek; and Baptiste, his mind still full of the night's travail, thought of birth. He thought of The Birth, and an immense and terrible holiness shook him as with an ague. Why, God was right up in that tree. God—benignant, amused. He could talk with God if he cared to. He spread his hands in a little prayer, like a child that laughs and prays. He was shaken and spent with rapture.

Conceive of Baptiste if you can: an uncouth, oafish little man, thin and pointed and sly; but with something about him grotesque and delightful, for all the world like a clown —something of quaint buffoonery that charmed little children, even the little boys and girls who lived in the fine old houses along the river front and walked abroad so sweetly with their nurses.

"Hi, Baptiste!" they would squeal when they saw him; "Howdy, *Mister* Baptiste!"

And then they would laugh with an elfin delight as if they shared some wanton secret with him. And their nurses—respectable, coal-black "mammies"—would pull them away,

disgruntled: "Lawd, white chillun, come along. Dat triflin', low-down redbone—"

But this heaven-lent quality, whatever it was, that endeared him to children caused the women of his race to stick out their tongues at him. His love tale, how for a fabulous sum he bought from her father the prettiest maid in all the Indian pinewoods, was the talk of a region already famous far and wide for its romance. Baptiste—through no effort of his own, of course—was rich, as occasionally redbones get to be when their luscious acres fringe the winding Cane; and the slim and blossomy Clorinda had pleased him mightily. She was a lovely thing with sea-green eyes and the chiseled beauty her women possess for a season; and Baptiste thought of babies when he looked at her—he who could pipe to children and trill like a bird in a tree. They would come one right after the other, of course, as was right for babies to come: brown little stairsteps of children.

He had even gone so far as to hail old Granny Loon one time as she hobbled past the courthouse; Granny who brought her babies in baskets (white ones and black ones and yellow and red ones!) and charged a fortune a day.

"Hey, Granny, what you got in there?" he wheedled in a voice that had the drawling music of the sluggish old witch-river. "You give him to me for my wife, old Granny. Yessir, we need us a son."

But Granny, disdainful, made no reply; and shifting her mysterious basket, passed with dignity down the shaded street. She could be high-and-mighty when it pleased her and, "blue-gummed" African though she was—and proud of her pure descent—she was by virtue of her calling above and beyond all race distinction. Granny Loon was dedicated, consecrated, sacred. But the greasy old mulatto women

around their coffee stalls, who were shrewdly informed as to Granny's comings and goings, broke out into ribald laughter, shaking their fat gingham sides.

"Huh!" they snorted, "dat chile Granny got ain't fo' no ornery redbone. Dat chile is fo' white folks, yessir. Baptiste, he better go find his se'f one in de briar-patch."

He had swaggered away, Baptiste, pretending not to hear; but his face had burned and his heart had ached. Ah, but now he would show them. . . .

Baptiste, whose thoughts were prayerful if he but stumped his toe, had that very day taken up the matter with High Heaven. You slipped into the dim cathedral where God was all about you and your bony knees sank richly down into passionate crimson velvet.

"A son, sweet Saint. A lil' son. Send us a son, sweet Mother—"

And then to make assurance doubly sure, on emerging he had crossed two sticks to fling at a chance stray cat.

The creed of the redbone is past understanding: things vaguely heard and remembered; things felt and but dimly divined; superstitions drilled into him by the wrinkled old crones of his race. His religion is compounded of Catholic altars where candles burn through the thick dim smoke from the swinging incense bowls; of pinewoods tremulous like a sounding organ; of forest fires and thunders and winds; of fetishes against the powers of darkness; of a moon that comes up red from the swamp; of a wilful river that doles out life and death.

Sometimes when Baptiste lay prone on a hillside things came to him, ancient things, and he knew what people had known when the earth was young—something stirring in him that had swung a papoose in the treetops. Sometimes when the moon was thin and the cotton greening in the

fields was beginning to square, something lifted his soul that had strummed a guitar under a lady's window. Sometimes when that same young moon had grown sullen with orange fire, sometimes when he lay on the hot black earth and heard the negroes singing, something ached within him like the curse of a voodoo witch.

His patron saint he had chosen for reasons best known to himself, not the least significant of which was the little saint's unobtrusiveness; for he was an ecstatic little blue fellow who lived in a niche of the church, in so dim and distant a corner that one might pray to him without exciting comment. The redbone, you must know, is secretive in matters religious; and pagan as he is at heart, is chary of dogma and fixed belief—his erratic worship being tolerated rather than condoned by the priesthood.

To this adopted saint, then, Baptiste told his beads, beseeching intercession: three masses a week, so many "Hail Marys," the Way of the Cross for a baby. Since he always returned from his orisons uplifted and slightly unsteady, Baptiste's mysterious pilgrimages had provoked his relatives to what was to them an obvious and foregone conclusion: Baptiste was drinking and gambling *awful!* He had better stay home with his wife.

Baptiste, jogging the deep-rutted roads, suddenly laughed and smacked at his pony. Now that a son had been born to him he would pour the shining dollars into his little saint's outstretched paws, the little saint who had moved Heaven and earth in his, Baptiste's, behalf. And then across the young day's joy a wavering shadow passed, and then another. Bats! From the swamp near by. The creatures came flickering, velvet-black and crazy, with the uncertain, chittering, sweezy sound that their wings make in the air; and when Baptiste struck out to fend them off,

one of the gibbety things fell to the earth, stricken. Aghast that he had unwittingly wounded the devil's own, Baptiste turned straight about, although fully two miles from home. The sweet havoc in his heart had chilled into dreadful foreboding—for what man in his senses would flaunt such disaster?

Could it mean that his child was ill, perhaps at this moment dead?

When he rode into the back yard he saw his wife's pink petticoat a-hanging in the sun. His throat was dry and parched as he opened the kitchen door.

Granny was in the kitchen, crouching over the stove and stirring a viscous substance in a kettle. Her sacred basket hung above her on a nail. Her snowy white head was bound with a red bandanna, and she wore a spotless apron in the pocket of which was a buckeye to ward off the dread swamp fever. From a cord around her neck hung a curious carved African stone that dangled against her breasts. She turned and squinted at him as he entered.

"The lil' feller . . . is he . . . do he still breathe? Answer me, old woman."

Granny shrugged her shoulders. Her scorn of men was instinctive, she who assisted them into the world and first clothed their nakedness. There was not a midwife in all that neck of the woods who could hold a candle to her. When not "waiting" on a woman she lived alone on the edge of the Indian pine-woods in a shack half hidden with splashy sunflowers. There was a rail fence around it and toadstools at the door; and in the back yard an iron pot that looked like a cauldron. She was age-old and deathless, and all her movements were soft as if timed to the sleeping of children.

She gave Baptiste a mystic look; and then from above, down the rickety stairs, there sounded a thin little wail.

Baptiste listened, woe in his eyes. It sounded so strange and so young.

"Mon Dieu!" he implored, "what was that?"

"De good Lawd he'p us," Granny answered, stirring and tasting, tasting and stirring. "Fo' shame, Mister Baptiste Grabbo. Dat up dere's yo' son, man, a-cryin' fo' his dinner."

"And her? Is she well?—Clorinda—"

His agonized eyes searched the old woman's face, but Granny was muttering incantations over her ill-smelling brew: runes for the newborn babe and his mother; spells against milk-leg and childbed-fever. It was a full minute before she turned to him her sibyl face, wrinkled with a thousand tragedies.

"Gawd-a-mighty!" she grumbled, "how many time yo' come runnin' back to ask 'bout dat wife an' dat chile? How come yo' don't go an' git outer my way? I done brung a many a baby, to white folks an' niggers an' mixed blood too. But I ain't nebber seen no daddy take on like dat befo'. Nussir, not since I been bo'n."

She looked at him and relented. "Heylaw—wait, I go make yo' a cup—"

Baptiste sat down, still shaking, and Granny poured for him hot black comforting coffee. Behind her somewhere in the dim old house she heard a door open and close. But her gaze held Baptiste's eye.

"Now, go long wid yo'se'f, Mister Grabbo," she said when he had drained the last drop. "A fine strappin' son yo' got, an' yo' all a-tremblin' and shakin'. I oughter brung yo' a lil' ole puny gal. Now yo' go on to town an' git drunk like a man."

Baptiste stumbled out into the sunlight, his heart mounting again with the joy-giving warmth of the coffee. *Mon*

Dieu! What a fool he was indeed! Well . . . It was broad daylight now, and in the brick courtyard he saw Olaf, his overseer, puttering around. Olaf was blond and giant-like, and although he had been but a tramp two years before when Baptiste picked him up in town to help with a big cotton crop, he had gradually taken the reins in his hands; and of late he flaunted a bullying, insolent manner that was like a slap in the face.

To-day, however, although Olaf's sullen bigness oppressed Baptiste as usual, his heart at sight of the younger man turned over with pride of possession; and Baptiste felt suddenly sorry for Olaf. Olaf had no little son, no pretty wife and child.

"Hey, Olaf boy!" he called with gayety, "what you think of that baby, huh? You go and you tell that old granny in there to let you look at that child. You kiss him, Olaf—just once, mind. You go and tell 'em I sent you."

Baptiste passed through lanes that were dense with Cherokee roses, on down the road through the frenzied bloom of blackeyed Susan and bitterweed. And where the sinuous river begins to work its magic he saw the town, already asleep with summer. On the edge of the commons the breath of sweet-olive rushed at his lips like a kiss; and it is here that the road grows into a street, with quaint little sociable houses that squat on the sidewalk like children. The morning was lavish of sunlight that looked as if you could peel it up in thick yellow flakes, and as Baptiste jogged on into town his feeling of holiness grew, the feeling of brooding infinity.

He considered: Court was in session; along the narrow streets ox-teams were crawling and creaking, filled with niggers and country people "passing" the time of day; now and then some fine old carriage, drawn by satin bays,

would permit him a glimpse of ravishing ladies in gay little flowered bonnets; around the hitching-posts on the river bank, where umbrella-chinas made pools of shade and the flies circled, drunken and sleepy, the planters had left their horses and mules; and bits of blue and orange and red flashed abroad in the streets. Baptiste sighed with a deep satisfaction. It was, indeed, a gala day in tune with his heart's own joy.

He left his pony in the shade and started afoot for the courthouse in search of his dear friend, Toni La Salle. For Baptiste had wisely decided that before he could quench his thirst his news must be told; and some one other than himself must be the bearer of it, to give it due weight and importance. Toni, who loved to gossip and whose mind was the mind of a child, must go and tell those women around their coffee stalls that Heaven had blessed Baptiste's marriage and had sent him a little son.

Baptiste, as he had expected, found Toni hanging about the courthouse, grabbing at stray tamales and running everyone's business. He enticed the boy to the shade of a magnolia tree and stuck a hand in his pocket.

"Toni, my love, my son," Baptiste said, "I got great news for you. Out to my house we got us a baby—now what you think about that?"

Toni seemed unimpressed, but his shallow eyes wavered to the money in Baptiste's hand.

"A *son,* Toni. A man-child, mind, what Granny Loon bring in her basket. Now listen to me: you go spread the news and I give you this dollar. You tell all those women, and this money is yours. A son, remember, and not no girl. And listen to me: his mama's eyes, maybe, but a head like his papa's, Toni. Yessir, you tell 'em that my

baby's his daddy's son from his head clear down to his heels."

Toni departed, enraptured; but he had gone only a few steps when Baptiste ran after him. "Wait, Toni my boy. Not so fast, not so fast. Now listen: my son he ain't no puny child. He'll make a big strappin' man. You tell all those meddlesome women my son he weigh ten pound."

As Toni made his announcements, Baptiste behind the screen of magnolias witnessed the incredulous excitement along the coffee stalls; noted with joy the uplifted arms and rolling eyes of the gossipers. Well, by the time he had had a drink or two, he calculated, the news would be abroad and he could saunter forth to receive congratulations and the jests which the occasion demanded. "Papa" his friends would call him. "Papa Grabbo." How sweet, how delicious, how holy!

Baptiste ambled gaily through a swinging door and had a drink across a slick green counter; and then another and yet another. Like wine in your very soul it was to be a father, the father of a son. He wiped his mouth on a greasy sleeve and smiled. It was the practiced smile of aloof indifference that he'd seen upon the lips of younger papas. He felt waggish and tipsy. Bah—a son? It was two little sons that he had.

He emerged into the sunlight comfortably drunk, so that the world remained a crushed-strawberry pink.

The merchants down the street were lying in wait for him. There was something in the thought of Baptiste's being a papa that tickled their funny-bones—Baptiste a day-old papa and drunk, with money burning his pocket! A boat had come up the river from New Orleans only the week before, and they had consignments to show him: displays of magnificent silks and shawls and fans and plumes

from the East. But although Baptiste's eyes warmed to the sheen of the cloth, he refrained from buying. Nothing suited his mood. Silks and shawls were as dust—*Mon Dieu* —for would not moths corrupt them and thieves break through and steal? A jewel, the merchants advised him. A ruby, glowing with passion in the deep rich heart of itself. But Baptiste waved their gleaming trays away. Bah! A jewel he had given Clorinda the time his mare had a colt!

The merchants, shrugging their shoulders, fell in with his mood. A rosary, then, of amethysts, to kiss the holy hours into Heaven. Or a statue—see?—of the Virgin. A pretty gilded thing with the Child in blue, such a fat little kissable Christ. Surely this, this out of them all to commemorate Clorinda's motherhood.

But even this did not please Baptiste, although his fingers, tapered like a woman's, lingered adoringly on the Child's sweet china curls. Gold and frankincense and myrrh he would have laid at Clorinda's feet, mother of his son. He felt uplifted, eternal. A necklace of stars should encircle her throat and the moon she should wear for a halo.

He hunched his shoulders, inarticulate, he who could talk one language with his tongue and fifteen with his hands and eyes.

"Something . . . not to break," he besought them. "Something to set up in the parlor, maybe, like a what-you-call-'em. Something what my son can say: 'Look here, this here my papa he bought one time when I was born.'"

They brought forth glittering prismed lamps and carpets splashed with huge roses. They brought forth a hand-carved "press"; they brought forth imposing family albums of elegant crimson velvet. But Baptiste gestured and shook his head.

"Something nobody ain't had," he insisted. "Something big and grand, like a organ, maybe."

"Huh, go buy her the church, Baptiste," one of the merchants suggested.

Baptiste's eyes, wishful and strange, turned to the ivied cathedral. His thoughts were still rapturous. Across the street, two by two, the nuns were pacing to prayers, and Baptiste's joy was tinged with melancholy for their pale, frustrated womanhood. By all the saints in Heaven, sweet women like that weren't made to spend their days down on their knees!

And then somebody waved to him from across the way. It was Zuboff, of course, a distant kinsman, his thin little body in slim silhouette against a background of marble.

Baptiste gestured the clamoring merchants away and started across the street, swaying a little.

There had been an epidemic of yellow fever in Natchitoches that spring, a crawling, devastating thing that had licked up the high and the low; and for old Zuboff, the monument man, business was thriving and good. Baptiste saw that he was engraving cunning little names and dates on the surface of cold marble: "So and So; *Mort* such-and-such-a-date: Thy Will Be Done." To-day Baptiste was oddly aroused. Old Zuboff, his tongue in his cheek, wielded the mallet and chisel adroitly with tender caressing fingers. He looked up at Baptiste's approach and nodded hospitably.

"Sit down, Cousin, sit down," he invited, "right there on *Tante* Lisa's tombstone. Ah, Mister Papa Grabbo, well . . . what about that baby?" His tone changed and a craftiness caught in his hard little eyes. "Ah, Baptiste, sorrow we've had . . . trouble and tribulation. The Catholic graveyard is full."

Baptiste belched and spat at a date, 1852. "My son is a big fine child--" he began. But Zuboff cut him short, Zuboff the father of ten.

"Two dozen order for tombstone I got," he imparted, seeking without success to look lugubrious; "and all for the rich white folks. A new lot on hand last week too, Baptiste, what come on the boat from the city. Such beautiful granite, exquisite marble! Come with me, Baptiste, come, come."

In the rear of his shop, his holy of holies, Zuboff parted a curtain and with an air of solemn pride motioned Baptiste to enter. Within he displayed his masterpieces—two shafts with wreaths of lilies and with beautiful wide-winged angels. Passionately Zuboff ran his fingers over the hard white bodies. "Superb, Baptiste," he muttered, wetting his lips; "Cherubim, Cousin, and seraphim—" His voice sank to a whisper. "You hear 'bout them two nun what is sick at the convent? Well, then, who know . . . 'Tis good to be prepare. And only last night the priest he say—"

Baptiste's heart had turned over. He breathed heavy and hard in his throat. Cherubim and seraphim . . . they fell on his soul like music; they sounded like the glad hosannas that children sing at Christmas; they sounded like the holy joy of his little newborn babe. He thought he had never seen anything so beautiful as those angels. He gulped and aimed tobacco juice at 1852. Those po' sick nun at the convent—well, he was powerful sorry for them. But no, they could never sleep beneath these majestic wings. Not so long as he, Baptiste, had money in his pocket.

"Zuboff, I want them tombstone," he declared. He caught at the angels to steady himself, his throat burning, his eyes bloodshot. "I want 'em both, for me and my wife. Yessir, we got to die some day, same as them nun at the convent.

'Tis good to be ready, yessir, just like what you say. And you listen to me, Cousin Zuboff; you put this on one, like a poetry: *Clorinda, the wife of Baptiste Grabbo, and Mother of his Son.*"

Baptiste, having emptied his pockets at the shrine of his patron saint, jogged out of town in the late evening sunlight. His babe's little cry, thin and strange, still echoed in his heart: and he felt that if he could sing it the sound would be like those young pale leaves on the quivering cottonwood trees. On the edge of the commons the Angelus caught him, dropping the Holy Trinity soft into the waiting stillness. Baptiste bowed his head and crooned a prayer. It was a prayer that was half a lullaby to the wife and the child of his heart, a plaintive maudlin lullaby as sick with love as the moon. . . .

His horse, head down, tail swinging, rocked him home. Sometimes—swaying and riding, riding and swaying—Baptiste would feel again the damp, velvet kiss of the bats. But he was too drowsy to care. When his pony finally nosed down the bars of the gate and wandered into the lot, it was nearly midnight. The moon had set and myriads of stars swam out into the heavens. The sky looked billowy, as if you could catch the corners of it and toss the stars around as in a net. Mosquitoes, thin and fierce, whined keen in his ear.

Baptiste slumped down from his horse and did not see the figure that slipped out the door through the shadows. He felt for the gate and stumbled toward the steps. Old Granny, according to custom, was waiting to receive him and assist him to bed. She loomed before him, a shapeless thing smelling of paregoric. She helped him into the house and up the rickety stairs; and instinctively, her haughtiness

gone, this mother of a race began to croon as she pulled off his shoes. A man, bah! They never grew up. They were all helpless babes in the cradle, to be comforted, petted, and nursed.

Granny lifted, half-dragged Baptiste to a featherbed in the corner and she paused at the door to look back at him—a little amusing toy of a man like she'd seen in Christmas stockings. He was muttering in his drunken sleep, something concerning angels and stars and cradles high in the treetops.

"De Lawd hab mussy on our souls!" she said as she closed the door. She stood there a moment—motionless, sad, peering before her.

Old Zuboff worked industriously on Baptiste's beautiful gravestones, concealed behind the curtain in the little back room of his shop: for Baptiste had insisted that his gift be kept a secret; only Zuboff was to know, and Zuboff's sons, until the monuments were erected and he could reveal them to Clorinda. Faithfully, zealously Zuboff worked, for even without the discount in courtesy due a kinsman, they would bring him nine hundred dollars in gold. Late every night old Zuboff worked, sawing and scraping and filing and chiseling until "Clorinda" took shape from the marble. *"Clorinda, the Wife of Baptiste Grabbo, and Mother of his Son."*

Three weeks it took to engrave them, and during this time Baptiste went back and forth from house to town like a shuttle, riding his runty red pony. He liked to loaf around Zuboff's shop and watch the old man at work. "Clorinda, the Wife of Baptiste Grabbo, and Mother of his Son." In truth, a poem in marble. He knew every stroke of the mallet, every delicate curve of the chisel. And as

their beauty and dignity took hold of his very soul, he hinted to Zuboff, wistfully, that he would like to set the gravestones up as statues in his house. But Zuboff made fun of him:

"Bah! A graveyard Baptiste wants in his parlor! Look what a cousin I got!"

Often as Baptiste sat and watched old Zuboff work he would talk of his son, of the changed and changing ways of his household, of the growing demands of Clorinda. This and the other thing she must have—lace for that infant, yessir, made by the nuns at the convent; a baby-buggy with canopied top, all silk and velvet and tassels, to wheel that child around in the yard same as if he was big-folks. Baptiste would grunt and throw out his hands, but in his heart he was pleased.

"Bah!" he complained, "a prince we got. Nothing ain't good enough. That baby he ruin me, Zuboff. He got to live just like a king."

The goings-on of Baptiste's family were, indeed, the talk of the countryside; living like big-folks, yessir, just because, with children as common as pig tracks, old Granny Loon had fetched 'em one po' lil' baby.

"Well, now, for suppose we do that way whenever *we* get us a baby!" women said to their husbands, rolling their eyes.

Baptiste's old adobe house, with its sagging roof and its paved courtyard in the rear, was hilarious night and day with relatives come to take potluck—like a party that would go on forever. And when at home, four times a day Baptiste made coffee and four times passed it around. Always wine a-flowing too, to pledge the young child's health. His male relatives began to view Baptiste with heightened respect and to ask his advice about corn and cotton and the raising of

young pigs. But the female ones, as was the custom, ignored him pleasantly; and this, too, enchanted Baptiste.

"Howdy, Papa!" they would call, impudently. "Howdy, Papa Grabbo!"

And away they would bustle to talk with Granny of broths and brews and teas; of the merits of sassafras root boiled down to make the milk come fast; of this, that, and the other thing that women have always known.

Impossible to work. Out in the fields the darkies sang all day and half the night. And the place, despite its joyousness, was going to wrack and ruin because Olaf, the sullen young fool, was always a-fishing under a tree, seduced by the old witch-river. Time and again Baptiste made up his mind to bring Olaf to task; but he himself was filled with exquisite lassitude. And on those rare occasions when there were no petticoats about, the lure of the cradle drew him to sit and gaze at the baby, or sing his queer little lullabies, always about the moon—the great big yellow nigger-moon that rose up out of the swamp. . . .

Three weeks of this while Zuboff worked: and then of a sudden, putting and end to festivity, August had come like a smothering blanket; and all the breath and bloom of summer had rotted to a stench.

On a certain morning during this month a log wagon drawn by three yoke of oxen set out from Natchitoches, toiling painfully over the rutted roadways where the weeds were rank and heavy with dust. Propped upright in the wagon were Baptiste's beautiful monuments, the lovely spreading angel-wings bulging in fantastic fashion under layers of cotton sacking. There were cloud shadows running far and sweet across the fields that morning, but no rain; and at noon, as the oxen grunted under a blazing sun, buzzards wheeled and floated against a sky that showed through

the trees in splotches of hot hard blue. It was late afternoon when the wagon reached the Grabbo burying-ground.

Here Baptiste and Zuboff and Zuboff's sons got out and erected the shafts—the one on the left for Clorinda, the one on the right for Baptiste. "Like when you lay in bed," Baptiste insisted. For this would be their marriage-bed, eternal in the heavens.

The burying-ground of the Grabbos is nearly a mile from the house in a secluded spot that the negroes shun on the edge of the Indian pinewoods: six bayberry bushes, three cedars; and among the tangled grasses many a Spanish cross. When Zuboff and his sons had gone, Baptiste spent an hour gathering branches of leaves and flowers and trailing honeysuckle. He found some old, old roses too, and masses of golden lovebine; and he made them into garlands and draped them over the stones so that they covered the wreaths and the angels and Zuboff's so-beautiful verses.

Finally, having looked upon his labor and seen that it was good, he sat down on a stump to make his plans. That night when the moon rode high, he decided, he would put Clorinda on the back of his pony and lead her across the cotton fields and up to the edge of the woods. And there he would unveil his shining tributes, unveil them of leaves and of flowers. It would be her first excursion since the baby came, and she would laugh in the mocking way he loved. And because she could not read, he, who knew them by heart, would recite the verses to her while she traced them with her finger: *"Clorinda, the Wife of Baptiste Grabbo, and Mother of his Son."* He knew how her eyes would look, strange eyes that eluded you so that you had to search for them like flowers in the grass. . . . The moon would spill white magic. Who could tell but that here amid the dead she would give him of her love, she so stingy

with kisses! She would be all in white; and as he looked at her he would see her head, Madonna-wise, hallowed against the moon. . . .

And later, of course—Baptiste chuckled—in a day or so, perhaps, he would have all the relatives out to a gumbo-supper or something; and maybe he'd make 'em a speech!

Baptiste felt the need of coffee, thick and strong and black. He straggled to his feet and trailed along through the fields toward home. The sun had gone, raw and flaming; and already mosquitoes were stirring—great, filmy, floating things as they get to be in August. The canebrake looked snaky and the bilious breath of cotton blooms hung low like a sickly incense. Baptiste walked slowly, dragging his feet. It was the season of three-day chills. When he reached home it was good dusk.

Old Granny was sitting on the gallery, alone with the baby. She seemed surprised to see him and a little anxious.

"How come yo' done come back fum town?" she wanted to know. "How come yo' don't stay all night at Zuboff's, like yo' say?" She squinted at him suspiciously and puffed on her corncob pipe. "How come yo' ain't gone an' git drunk, same as always?"

Baptiste smiled. One corner of his mouth turned up and the other down. "Where is the lil' mama?" he inquired. "What you got her a-doing now, old woman, with your hoodo tricks and such?"

Old Granny looked at him, then veiled her eyes. She seemed withdrawn and mystic. Suddenly she spoke out, something indignant and venomous in her drawling, cool old voice. "Hit been mos' four week since dat baby come," she recited; "an' all dat time she a-pesterin' me to let her take a walk. Jest down by de gate. An' all in good time, I keep tellin' her. De ladies in town, *dey* minds what I

say. Six weeks, an' *den* take a walk. But to-night . . . out she go. Jest like wild hosses was pullin' her."

Baptiste mopped his streaming face. The baby, naked but for a swab of flannel about his belly, lay on a pallet and stared at the moon. Now and then he squirmed, with a quick little wrench as of pain. Baptiste regarded him anxiously. "The lil' feller . . . is he sick?" he asked, the ever-present fear tight at his heart.

"Colic," old Granny grumbled. "Dey all has de colic. Dem dat is hearty."

A surge of pride, intense, unreasonable, poured into Baptiste's heart: a nice healthy baby with colic. Well . . . he liked it that his baby was just as other babies. And then a hot resentment flamed within him, a primitive ache to hear his mate a-crooning over a cradle. "The lil' feller got colic," he grunted, "well, why ain't she a-singing, then? She belong here, where the baby got colic."

Granny grunted behind the cypress-vines and slapped at the flies with her fan. She looked like one of the fates sitting there, the old tragic one with the shears. She pulled herself up and suggested coffee, and creaked across the floor in her flat bare feet. But Baptiste shook his head. "I b'lieve I go find Clorinda," he said, dispiritedly. "I go find that baby's mama. He need her a-singing."

Down by the gate he looked. But no mutinous wife was walking in the shadows. The front yard was matted and rank with weeds, and the stench of the cotton blooms hung sickly sweet, head high. A plume of lilac brushed his face as if she had just passed; the pale mist of crêpe-myrtle trees closed languidly about him.

And then, suddenly, Baptiste saw her through some bushes. She was stealing, gliding soundlessly (blood of an Indian squaw!). She wore something bright in her hair, some-

thing bright and festive like a star. She had on shoes and stockings. . . .

He opened his mouth to call her, but as he did he saw that she was taking the path which led through the fields to the burying-ground; and a terrible thought came to him: had one of the niggers been spying? Did she know about the gravestones?

She began to run—Granny was right—as if wild horses were pulling her. Baptiste, keeping to the trees along the river, followed draggingly. In places the river was choked with scum and pinkish water-hyacinths, as if—with death in its heart—it had woven a shroud for itself and had strewn it with flowers. Above it hung an evil moon, a yellow witch in a mist that drew the cotton blooms unto itself and spilled them back to the earth. From remote and outlying cabins Baptiste could hear low snatches of song, and he knew that the niggers about the place were sitting in their doorways—half naked, and half asleep, and half crazy with the heat and the cotton scent. . . . Now and then there was chanting . . . and stealing shapes in the fields; for there is a night life that goes on among negroes as it does among beasts and insects—creatures that see in the dark and prowl and flit. . . .

Baptiste now saw Clorinda flash through the sugar-cane patch on the edge of the burying-ground. He stole after her. Her slim arms, out-straying to the brambles, had a soft expectancy about them—Madonna-arms, rocking. There was hidden joy in her swift sure flight.

And now, ten feet away, white against the cedars, white against the bayberry bushes, white against the roses of the dead—Baptiste saw her go into Olaf's arms. The moon was a lover's moon by now, beginning to float and run; and in its path they stood with the soft breast of a pine tree

pushed against them. They were just in front of the garlanded monuments, standing on the place that would yawn some day to receive unto itself sweet human flesh. . . . And it seemed to Baptiste's fevered gaze that one of the terrible angels was holding a flaming sword above their heads. . . .

He sank down presently upon the trunk of a fallen cedar, a movement that made a swishing sound like a wood creature stirring. He felt cold under his shirt, benumbed. He didn't know how long he had been sitting there when Clorinda stole away. . . . Once he had heard Olaf say, "Tomorrow night . . . if he goes to town, you come to me. Get away from that old hag of a granny. I'll be waiting, girl, same as always." The sullen insolent voice of Olaf the tramp!

Baptiste got to his feet and straggled back to the house.

The following day Baptiste spent off in the woods and fields, making arrangements, perfecting his plans, a terrible woe in his eyes so that he had to return to the house at intervals and drink coffee, heavy and strong and black. During these intervals he avoided the baby—the little son that his saint had sent. And whenever it cried, Baptiste in agony would put his trembling fingers in his ears. 'Cose now, he conceded, the little saint had managed as well as he could; the little blue saint in the grotto whose business it was to look after him and who did it rather well, all things considered. Take those gravestones, for example: they, or one of them, would come in pretty handy; and who but his saint, with foresight rare, had led him to erect them? . . . But now, of course, there was business to do. And he alone must do it; a duty inevitable, according to his code.

Clorinda? . . . He shrugged his shoulders and dismissed her. She was after all a woman, a young woman and a fool. A few drinks and a few "Hail Marys" and he could in time forgive her. He even felt a certain sorrow for her, so radiant she had been. Well, she would say (she and Granny) that the river had swallowed Olaf—he was always slipping his evil body deep in its bilious slime. And Granny would remind them of what people have always said: that when a stranger drinks of the waters of the Cane he can never leave the land of Natchitoches. Yes, when they went to look for Olaf they would cross themselves and lament that the river had swallowed him up.

At twilight the heat was intense; and the big sullen moon, shoving a dusky shoulder over the edge of the swamp, brought with it a desperate booming of bullfrogs. The baby was fretful again, but now Clorinda sat on the gallery and held it in her arms, her eyes brooding dark in the gloom.

Baptiste got up presently and yawned, and moved off into the shadows. He slipped through the fields and was first at the tryst. And when he saw Olaf coming he stepped out into the moonlight with something hoofed and horned and forked about him. . . .

The Indian in Baptiste performed the deed with neatness and despatch, so that Olaf for an instant knew only a face before him—high cheek bones, thin straight lips, and comic eyes that were sad. The Spanish in Baptiste dug the grave and the French tossed a rose upon it.

But the something unaccounted for that made him what he was sent him dragging back to the house, his face the color of leaves. Clorinda had gone to bed and had taken the baby with her. But old Granny was waiting for him behind the cypress-vines. She peered at him out of the

darkness. "Lawd-a-mighty, man," she said, "I 'spec' I go make yo' some coffee."

Baptiste gave her a faint smile, and his familiar hunch of the shoulders. But his voice when he spoke had lost its music. It was the old flat voice of despair.

"I thank you, Granny Loon," he said; "but me, I b'lieve not to-night. Not nothing, if you will excuse me, I feel—" He touched his stomach—"I feel . . . moved inside myself."

Above him down the rickety stairs there sounded a little wail—thin and strange and very, very young.

It is lazy and sweet along the Côte Joyeuse and on into the piney red-clay hills; for Time has been kind to Natchitoches. At the Resurrection season every year an Art Colony descends upon it with pallet and brush to paint its decaying witchery against the glory of massed crêpe-myrtles. There are little shops along St. Denis Street where you can buy flamboyant postcards, stating in wreaths of roses "This is the land God remembers."

How beautifully, indeed, He remembers! . . . A church still reaching its golden domes to the blue, wide summer sky; a river no longer willful since the Chamber of Commerce, smugly entrenched behind wrought-iron balustrades, has diverted its meanderings and confined it into a lake. "The Beautiful and Dammed," as the young artists call it.

The town itself looks on at all this pleasant exploitation like a little old high-born exquisite lady laughing up her sleeve. . . . At certain seasons of the year the breath of sweet-olive still blows delicately.

On a dewy summer morning the great bell in the domed cathedral, having just come back from Rome, began to toll. There were numbers of cars parked along St. Denis Street

and in front of the courthouse where, if you be so minded, you can still loaf and invite your soul. And people drawled to one another, "Well, I wonder who's dead."

A few of the idly curious about the coffee stalls began to count the strokes of the bell: "Thirteen . . . fourteen . . . fifteen—"

Now it is said that for each of these mellow golden dropping balls of sound (you can count up to twenty between them) you must pay one good dollar bill. Take a rich man, now: when he dies, say the wise ones, the tolling is greatly prolonged. Occasionally, if the deceased be poor, a hat will be passed around among his relatives, who contribute to the tolling-fund according to their pockets, the generosity of their hearts, and the amount of family pride they possess.

"Twenty-two . . . twenty-three . . . twenty-four—"

The loafers around the coffee stalls were becoming elated now. They began to speculate, "What you bet? I bet you the Mayor's dead."

To one side of the courthouse, in the shade of a giant magnolia, there was a little group of boys sitting astride a barrel and being cleverly painted by three young ladies in knickers. They were stunted, tragic-eyed little fellows, and curiously apathetic. But when the bell stopped tolling they crossed themselves and looked at one another in awe. "Hey-law, well . . . she's gone," they said. "Old lady Grabbo's dead."

Old Baptiste had passed on in the same manner many years before.

Up in the lazy red-clay hills the relatives had been gathering for hours to the bedside of Madame Clorinda (such was her title among them!). They came, some of them,

driving shiny new Fords; others, whole families together, creaked along in wagons behind undersized scrawny old horses. Out at the Grabbo house everybody kissed everybody else and whispered in mournful eagerness: "She's sinking. Yessir, the doc he say that she can't last out the night."

But the bloated old creature was three days a-dying, a death like that of a princess. And during this time of her soul's travail she talked incessantly of the monument which, it seemed, had been erected for her long ago in the family burying-ground. Her dim thoughts, fitful and already strange with eternity, were full of it: how that her husband, himself asleep this many a year, had bought it with his own in Natchitoches; how handsome it was, so that people used to journey miles to see it; how that every fine Sabbath afternoon she had walked through the fields with bouquets of waxy cape jasmine to lay among the grasses and the blowing buttercups—one for Baptiste and one for herself, in the place that would yawn wide for her.

Three days of this, and then she lay ponderous in death; and according to her dying wish, word was dispatched to town to have the bell tolled sixty times, once for each of her years. Two at her head and two at her feet the tall white candles burned, while outside in the soft air that was languid and sweet with summer the negroes began to sway and rock; and her relatives, standing about in store-bought clothes as if bid to a marriage feast, drank coffee and said among themselves it had been a most beautiful passing.

And then something happened. There came riding a man on horseback. He was a distant cousin and he was one of the gravediggers, it seemed. His clothes were caked with mud, and buttercups stuck weirdly in his hair. He looked

frightened (Holy Mother preserve us!) and he said that in digging the grave of the deceased beside that of her husband, in the Grabbo burying-ground, they had come upon a human skeleton cradled in what remained of a hastily-constructed old yellow-pine box.

THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

By

Charles Caldwell Dobie

WITHIN a hundred yards of the hill's crest Walton Pringle's pocket flash winked spasmodically and died. He paused a moment to catch his breath; the pull up from the creek bed had winded him and the sting of cold rain in his face added a further discomfort. If he hadn't dawdled at Preston's Flat, hoping for the rain to cease or abate, he would have made his objective before nightfall. But since he had elected to wait so long it would have been much better to continue there until next morning. As it was, he felt sure that he had strayed from the trail—a particularly unhappy thought to a man who could claim only a speaking acquaintance with the wilderness. And this too under the pall of a stormy night without the slightest ray of light to guide him. Well, the best he could do was to stumble on: it was far better to keep moving in circles than to resign himself to inactivity and chills.

He was glad now that he had been persuaded to take a pistol when he came away from Walden's Glen. If he were lost, at least he could provide himself with game, and in the mountains one could never tell how long one might wander aimlessly along false paths once the proper trail was abandoned. At first this pistol business had seemed absurd: California was no longer a bandit country, and even if it were he had nothing worth stealing. A jack-knife, a pocket-

flash, two bars of chocolate, and a sheaf of notes on "Itinerant and Rural Labor and Its Relation to Crime" were poor pickings for a hold-up man. His notes especially were valueless to anyone save himself, and even their loss would not have been irreparable. He was still near enough to his investigations to have the material for his book clearly fixed in his mind and, once back at his desk in San Francisco, he would be able to recall every detail of the last two weeks spent among the economic nomads of the mountains. But in spite of all these obvious guarantees against violence, it appeared that there *were* reasons for being forearmed. . . . It was Lem Thatcher, one of the old-timers, who had put him straight on this point.

"Bandits be damned!" Thatcher had exclaimed. "But how about a stray bobcat? Or a crazy man? Or a lost trail? . . . A man who goes into the open with nuthin' but a jack-knife and a couple o' bars o' chocolate is a fool. . . . Give a man a gun and you give him the next thing to a pardner."

Under the depression of the moment he felt that his original stupidity lay not so much in failing to realize the needs of such a trip as in essaying the venture at all. Why hadn't he been sensible and taken the stage as far as Rock Point and swung on from there to Marchel Duplin's cabin? He had no time to waste, and had there been no other reason this alternative would have given him several additional hours with a man who, everybody conceded, knew more about sheep herding than any other within a hundred miles. He had talked to a Basque shepherd near Compton's and to a Mexican herder just the other side of Willow Creek, attempting to get sidelights on their profession, but they had been taciturn and he without the proper moisture for limbering their tongues. Duplin, everybody conceded, was excep-

tionally garrulous for a sheep herder even when he had not the help of thin wine. It seemed expedient, then, to go to Duplin if he wished properly to complete the picture of rural economy whose drawing he contemplated. But for an untrained mountaineer—a tenderfoot, in fact—it was nothing save a whimsical extravagance to plunge along a fifteen-mile trail through forest and shifting granite when an easier course was open. Being valley bred, he hadn't expected rain in August, but if he had stopped to think he might have known that anything was climatically possible in the mountains.

Stumbling, crawling, cursing, somehow in spite of the blackness he felt himself making progress uphill. Presently his feet touched level ground. This in itself was reassuring. He raised his eyes in a desperate effort to pierce the gloom, took a few steps forward—and suddenly, miraculously, found himself in a clearing from which beckoned the friendly light of a cabin. With a smothered exclamation of joy he quickened his gait, almost running forward, and the next instant he had gained the window, instinctively stopping to peer within.

The unreality of the scene which met his eye gave Walton Pringle a feeling that he was either dreaming or gazing down on a stage set for a play: only sleep or the theater seemed capable of a picture so filled with melodrama. But in the theater one was never at once spectator and participant, and in sleep one did not have the tangible physical discomfort which he felt. He drew his rain-soaked body closer against the cabin, raising himself on his toes so that he might get a better view of the interior. A man stood hovering over a table lighted by an anæmic candle, and through his fingers dripped a slow trickle of silver. In a corner, uncannily outlined by a steady gleam of light, was a crucifix nailed to

the wall and below it lay a couch piled with disordered bed clothing. On the floor, midway between table and couch, was sprawled the figure of a man—arms flung wide, his black-bearded face upturned—a startling inanimate thing that made Walton Pringle turn away with a shudder. The man at the table undoubtedly was a thief. Was he also a murderer?

For the second time that night Pringle was glad that he was provided with a pistol, and yet in spite of his preparedness he had a momentary misgiving, an indecision: to be secured against an unavoidable contingency was one thing; to push deliberately into trouble was quite another. Pringle was no coward but he knew his limitations; he was not trained in any superlative skill with firearms. Was it discreet then to thrust oneself across the path of a desperate man?

He continued to gaze through the window with morbid fascination and uncertainty: the picture was too revealing—violence had been done, that was obvious; plunder was in process of accomplishment. A sudden disgust at his weak-kneed prudence stiffened his decision. At that moment the wind, flinging itself through the pine trees, sent a shower of twigs upon the cabin roof. The face at the table was lifted with a tragic sense of insecurity and fear; Pringle saw that it was the face of a young man, almost a boy. For a brief moment their eyes met; then without further ado Pringle crept swiftly to the door, hurling his body against it in anticipation of barred progress. The force of the impact carried him well into the room. The youth was on his feet and an exclamation halted on his thin pallid lips. Pringle whipped out his gun.

Walton Pringle did not utter a word; he merely gazed questioningly at the youth, who began to whine.

"I didn't do nuthin', honest I didn't. . . . I hope to die if—"

Pringle cut him short with an imperious gesture. The lad's manner as well as his physique was filled with a shambling, retarded maturity. His face was curiously pale for one from a rural environment, and his hair that should have been vivid and red had been sunburnt to a vague straw color.

"Hand over your gun!" Pringle demanded.

The youth straightened himself with a flicker of confidence. "I ain't got none!" he threw back.

Pringle searched him: he had told the truth. "Come then, give me a hand here!" he commanded, laying his own weapon on the table.

Together they lifted the inert body from the floor and placed it on the couch.

"He's dead!" the youth ventured.

Pringle put his hand to the man's heart. "So it seems," he returned dryly.

The dead man was swarthy and beetle browed, with wiry blue-black hair and beard. He was undressed save for a suit of thick woolen underwear and his feet were encased in heavy knitted gray socks. An ugly gash clotted his brow and the ooze of blood trickling thickly from the wound was staining the bedclothes. A flash of intuition lighted up Pringle's mental gropings.

"Is this Marchel Duplin's cabin?"

The youth stared, then nodded.

"And is this Marchel Duplin?"

"Yes."

Almost with the same movement Pringle and the youth turned away, the lad dropping into a chair before the table.

Pringle drew a bench from the wall and straddled it. "What's your name?" he demanded.

"Sam—Sam Allen."

"Where do you come from?"

"Down—down by Walden's Glen."

"Ah! . . . And what are you doing here?"

"Gettin' out o' the wet, mostly."

Pringle pointed to the heap of coins on the table. "And making a little clean-up on the side, eh? . . . Well, what have you got to say for yourself?"

Sam Allen dropped his ineffectual blue eyes. "Nuthin' much . . . I come here to get outa the rain, like I said before. He was layin' on the bed there, mutterin' to hisself, and burning up with fever. I went up to him and I says, 'Marchel, don't yer know me?' With that he grabs me by the throat. I never *did* see anybody get such a stranglehold on a man. . . . I jest couldn't pry him loose. He went down like a chunk o' lead. And when his head struck the ground"—Sam Allen shuddered—"It was jest like a rotten watermelon went squash. . . . I didn't dare look fer a minute, and when I did he was dead!"

"And then you proceeded to rob him, eh? Without even waiting to lift his dead body from the floor . . . or seeing what you could do to help him?"

Sam Allen shook his head. "I know when a man's dead . . . and I don't like to touch 'em, somehow—that is—not all by myself. It was different when you come. Besides, I've heerd tell that the law likes things left in a case like this—that it's better not to touch nothin'."

Pringle could not forego a sneer; really, the youth was too ineffectual! "Nothing except money, I suppose!"

Sam Allen ignored the sarcasm; it is doubtful if it really made an impression. "It musta got kicked out from under

his pillow in the scuffle. . . . Anyway, I seen it layin' there on the floor, jest where his head struck, almost. Of course I was curious." He turned a childishly eager face toward Pringle. "Do you know, he had nigh onto fifty dollars in that there bag."

"Indeed!"

But again Pringle's sarcasm rebounded and fell flat. Apparently Sam Allen was not quick witted. He mistook irony for interest. Without further urging the youth began to tell about himself. His father had a hog ranch just this side of Walden's Glen—a drab, filthy spot. This father kept drunk most of the time on a potent brand of moonshine which he himself distilled. The whole drudgery of the place had fallen on the boy. "Cows, I wouldn't have minded so much—they ain't dirty like pigs—leastways what they eat ain't!" He breathed hard when he spoke and his clipped words took on descriptive vehemence. The whole atmosphere of the Allen ranch rose in a fetid mist before Walton Pringle: hog wallow, sour swill, obscene grunts and squealings, the beastly drunkenness of Allen senior. Since no mention was made of a woman's presence, Pringle divined that there was none. Sam Allen had grown sick to death of it all and had run away: without money, provisions, or proper clothing—even lacking decent footgear—without plans. It was a pitiful story and yet it damned him superlatively; gave point to the situation in which he had been found. Listening to him Pringle lost the conviction that he was a premeditated murderer, but there seemed no reasonable doubt that he was an accidental one. It seemed he knew well the Duplin cabin; used to steal up there on rare occasions, when Marchel was out shepherding, to share the Frenchman's dribbles of thin wine. He liked wine. One mouthful and your heart felt freer, more gay. Why, one could sing

then—almost. At least Marchel Duplin could. Moonshine never gave a man a singing mood—only a nasty one. At this point Pringle could not forego a question: Did he know that Duplin had money? . . . Allen hesitated and Pringle had an impulse to warn him against answering; it didn't seem fair to let the boy unwittingly incriminate himself. But before Pringle could caution him the youth blurted out the truth: he had heard something of it. Pringle felt his heart contract in a rush of pity: the whole situation was so obvious—a desperate, weak, perhaps degenerate boy rushing blindly toward freedom and disaster. Had Duplin's wine jug been part of the youth's hapless plan? Had he attempted to get the shepherd drunk before he despoiled him?

At all events he hadn't managed skillfully and the Frenchman had put up a fight. The results spoke for themselves. Well, it all came back to heredity and environment. He'd have an interesting lot of notes to make on this case. No theorizing this time but something at first hand, alive and palpitating. Quite suddenly he found his pity receding, submerged by his scientific desire for truth. The youth before him was like a moth pinned to the wall, before which the investigator lost all sentimental interest in his eagerness to measure the duration of the death agony. Now was the time to get data, before fear or caution stepped in to dam up Sam Allen's naïve garrulity. Pringle was interested in the youth's mother. But Sam Allen couldn't remember much: Lizzie Evans, that had been her name—a girl who "worked out." Yet the very economy of this picture was illuminating. Lizzie Evans, a girl who "worked out." It was perfect! A girl who doubtless had been ruined, to use the phrase of unemancipated women. She probably had had just such a pinched, yellow, wistful face as the son she had borne to feed the hangman's noose. Pringle had a fad for recon-

structing the faces of mothers from the bolder outlines of their male offspring. He usually found the test successful even with the most rugged material; he had a feeling that in this case his imagination did not need to overleap any confines whatsoever to achieve its goal. Lizzie Allen, born Evans, had died: a futile, weak, anæmic slip of a girl, stifled by the nauseous vapors of the hog pens. Not that Sam Allen put it so, but Pringle could read a shorthand of life almost as skillfully as a complete script. He swung the conversation back to Allen senior. The son embellished the portrait with a wealth of sinister details, finishing with a malicious little chuckle.

"An' he's deputy sheriff for the district, too, moonshinin' an' all. . . . Oh, I've seen him track fellars down an' shoot 'em when they had the goods on him. Didn't matter whether they was guilty or not. . . . I've seen him beat 'em, too—over the head—with the butt of a pistol—or anything else that came handy!"

Pringle turned his eyes to the inanimate figure on the bed. How completely everything was dovetailing! *"I've seen him beat 'em, too, over the head."* Precisely. For all the youth's inadequacy he had absorbed some of the inhumanities from his sire.

A strange exalted cruelty began to stir in Walton Pringle, the cruelty of an animal on the scent of some furtive thing pitifully intent on escape. His mood must have communicated itself, for suddenly Sam Allen fell into a silence that no amount of prodding could shatter. Well, there could be little more that bore upon the particular issue. Pringle began to think of the most expedient move. He found himself shivering. Naturally, since he had been wet to the skin. . . . A rusty stove huddled itself just below one of the windows,

sending its pipe crazily through a shattered pane. Pringle suggested a fire; dumbly the youth assented. Together they began to collect debris from the cabin floor: crumpled newspapers, empty cartons, a handful of pine cones. Soon a cheerful blaze crackled and roared. Even Sam Allen found its warmth agreeable but its cheer did not serve to melt his sudden reticence.

Presently for lack of fuel the fire began to spend itself and its snap and roar sank to a faint hiss. The night too seemed to have grown miraculously silent. Pringle rose and threw open the cabin door. The rain had stopped, even the wind had fallen, and through a rent in the storm clouds far to the east a faint glow gave promise of a rising moon.

Pringle closed the door and went back to his place before the stove. The situation in which he found himself made him suddenly restive. It seemed as if he could not possibly wait until morning to settle the issue that must ultimately be settled.

Walden's Glen lay a good fifteen miles to the east, but at least it was for the most part down grade. His exhaustion of the previous hour had been swallowed up in the absorbing shock of drama. He felt like making a decisive move and yet a certain pity for Sam Allen, shrinking visibly before his questioning gaze, made him resolve to give the youth a meager choice in the matter. He sauntered casually to the table. The candle was guttering to a feeble decline, and it threw out a flickering light that touched with spasmodic fire the coins lying in a disordered heap where Sam Allen had abandoned them. Pringle ran his hand nervously through the silver pile.

"What do you think," he asked abruptly, "shall we strike out for Walden's Glen now, or wait till morning?"

Sam Allen gave a gasp. Then recovering himself, he

returned with slow drawling defiance, "If you're headed that way, suit yourself. . . . But I set out to leave Walden's Glen and I don't see no reason why I should go back."

Pringle felt himself grow ominously cool. "I dare say you don't. But, unfortunately for you, there *are* reasons. . . . In a way I'm sorry I walked into this mess. But I did walk in and I can't shirk my responsibility. There's the law to reckon with, you know!"

Sam Allen's lip began to tremble. "I tell you it was an accident. Don't you believe me?"

"No."

"And you mean to give me up—to—my father?"

Deputy sheriff for the district! For a moment even Pringle trembled: the picture which the youth had drawn of his sire had been too vivid. And besides, the bare situation was pregnant with disaster.

"I'm afraid there's no help for it," Pringle returned, trying to check any show of emotion. Sam Allen crept nearer to the table like a whipped dog. Pringle was stirred to a profound pity. "Besides," he went on more softly, "your father can't really touch you. You'll have all the law on your side."

Even in his terror the youth could not check a sneer. "Much you know about it!" he cried passionately.

"But I'll go with you—don't you understand—every step of the way . . . I mean, I'll stand by you till everything's put straight." Pringle broke off suddenly. Sam Allen's white face seemed to draw closer to the table and his two eyes were fixed craftily upon the gun which Pringle had neglected to restore to his hip pocket.

An intense nervous silence followed; Pringle made a swift movement toward the pistol, and the next moment the candle was violently extinguished.

Pringle stood momentarily inactive under the shock of surprise. The slam of the door roused him. He went stumbling through the gloom, knocking down impediments in his path until he gained the open. The moon was still hidden by the thick clouds in the east, but directly overhead a few stars showed dimly through thin vapors rising from the drenched hills.

Almost at once he realized the futility of pursuit. He knew nothing about the country, and besides, the greatest service he could render was to report the situation promptly. An aroused community would deal effectively with the murderer—he wouldn't get very far with his lack of resources and wit.

Pringle went back into the cabin and lighted the candle, forcing the stub out of the candlestick to prolong its life. The pile of silver had been scattered about by the impact of stumbling figures but it appeared otherwise intact; the pistol, however, had disappeared. Pringle laughed to himself, shrugging his shoulders. It was plain that he had much to learn about the custody of prisoners. Urged by the expediency of taking stock of all emphatic details connected with the situation, he raised the candle and swept the interior with its faint radiance. This was the first comprehensive view he had taken of the room. But there was really little of fresh significance: the cot on which lay the body of Marchel Duplin, the rusting stove, the table, the one chair, the bench; and over in a corner—back of the door when it swung open—a burlap curtain screening a shallow triangle. This last item was the only detail which had previously escaped him, partly because of its neutral color and partly because it hung in the shadow. A faint suspicion crossed him as he caught the movement of the curtain. He put the light down on the table. Could it be that the slammed

door following on Allen's apparent exit had been a clever ruse? He took a quick gliding step forward and thrust the curtain dramatically aside, almost expecting to find Sam Allen cowering behind it. But the space revealed nothing except a muddle of clothes and discarded boots, and a sharp current of air drifting through a wide crevice in the floor.

The reaction from the tenseness of expectation left him shivering. An impatience for the whole situation swept over him. He felt relieved that young Allen had fled, eluded him. It lifted an unpleasant duty from his shoulders and at the same time confirmed the youth's guilt. He would have hated, now that he considered it, to be the instrument for turning an uncertain situation into an inevitable one. His testimony might have damned an innocent man—that he was now willing to concede. But Allen's escape immeasurably cleared the issue: innocent people were never fearful. How many, *many* times, in divers forms, had this truism been brought home to him!

Yet in spite of the emphatic case against young Allen, Pringle felt the necessity of having his own movements clear in his mind. He'd be questioned, naturally; that went without saying. Quite rapidly he recapitulated the events of the day: the start from Walden's Glen at sunrise, the untoward rain at noon, his dawdling in the shelter of a redwood hollow against a sudden clearing; his resolve to push on when he saw no prospect of the storm's abatement. . . . It all sounded so clear and simple. Once he explained his mission, any testimony he might give must gather added weight. And his credentials would render his testimony doubly valuable. His book on *Radical Movements in Relation to Post-War Problems* would carry him past any reasonable skepticism, and then a B.A. from Yale and the pros-

pects of a Ph.D. from Columbia ought to impress even a rural magistrate.

He decided to count the money and take it with him to Walden's Glen. It wasn't safe to leave it in the cabin, and besides, it had a significant bearing on the case. In a half hour, he figured, the moon would be fully risen and if the sky continued to clear he would have a brilliantly lighted path to travel back.

He drew the single chair up to the table and fell to his task. The money was in all denominations of silver, but mostly quarters and halves. He began to group them into systematic piles. A faint scraping sound made him pause. . . . A twig, probably, brushing against the house. . . . He continued counting the money. Again the sound came. This time a tremor ran through him as he stopped his task. He kept his eye straight ahead as if fearing to turn to the right or left. Then slowly, fearfully, with the inevitability of one who feels other eyes fixed ironically upon him, he turned and looked up at the window, very much as Sam Allen had done less than an hour before. . . . A man's face answered his startled gaze and the next instant the door flew open.

Walton Pringle rose in his seat, again repeating the gesture of Sam Allen in a like situation. A faint, almost imperceptible sense of this analogy crept over him; he felt his heart suddenly contract.

The man in the doorway had an impressive bulk, a swaggering insolent grossness that must once have been robustly virile. His coarse under-lip had sufficient force to crowd upward a ragged mustache, and as he stepped heavily into the circle of light, Walton Pringle felt a glint of sardonic and unpropitiable humor leap at him from two piglike eyes.

"Where's Duplin?" the stranger demanded.

Pringle pointed to the cot. The visitor strode up to it and drew down the quilt. "Dead, eh!" He bent over closer. "Ah, a tolerable blow on the head. . . . Neat job, I'd say." He flung back the quilt over the face of the corpse with a gesture that showed an absolute indifference, a contempt even for the presence of death. "Well, stranger, suppose you tell me who you are?" There was an authority in his drawling suaveness which brought a quick answer. "Pringle, eh? . . . And just what are you doing here?"

Pringle stiffened with a rallied dignity. "I might ask you the same question. And I might ask your name, too, if I felt at all curious. As a matter of fact, I'm not, but I must decline to be cross-examined by a man I don't know."

A grim humor played about the protruding under-lip. "Correct, stranger, correct as hell! My name happens to be Allen—Hank Allen. That don't mean nuthin' to yer, does it? Well, I'll go further. I'm deputy sheriff for this county and I've got a right to question any man I take a notion to question. It ain't exactly a right I work overtime, but when I come into a man's cabin and find that man dead and a stranger pawin' over his money, I guess I just naturally calc'late that I'd better get on the job." He threw a pair of handcuffs on the table. "Why I happen to be here don't matter much, I guess. A man sometimes goes hunting for jack rabbit and brings home venison. You get me, don't yer?"

Walton Pringle stood motionless, trying to still the beating of his heart. He understood something now of Sam Allen's terror, Sam Allen's fear of being turned over to his father. But he knew also that a betrayal of fear would be one of the worst moves he could make.

"You don't have to tell me why you're here," he said

quietly, "now that I know your name. There's a runaway lad mixed up in it somewhere, if I'm not mistaken."

The barest possible flash of surprise lighted up the features of Hank Allen, destroying for a moment their brutal immobility. "I ain't saying 'yes' or 'no' to that," he half laughed, recovering his careless manner. "But I don't figger how that answers the question at hand."

Pringle smiled a superior smile. "Perhaps you're not the only one to look through the window at a stranger sitting before this table *pawin'* over a dead man's money. Perhaps I wasn't the first in the field. Perhaps there is more than you fancy to connect up a runaway lad with the question at hand. Who knows?"

Hank Allen's shoulders drooped forward with almost impalpable menace and his brows drew down tightly. "Look here, Pringle, I ain't accustomed to movin' in circles. When I shoot, I shoot straight. What's more, I usually set the pace. In other words, let's have no more riddles. Good plain language suits me. What's on your mind?"

Pringle shrugged his shoulders with a hint of triumph and proceeded to tell his adversary just what was on his mind in good plain language that he felt would suit Hank Allen down to the ground. But as he progressed he found an uneasiness halting the glibness with which he had opened fire: Hank Allen's impassivity became as inscrutable and sinister as a tragic mask whose inflexible outlines concealed a surface animate with fly-blown depravity. He finished upon a note of pity for the youth and rested his case with a tremulousness of spirit which disclosed that he was pleading his cause rather than Sam Allen's; and pleading, as Sam Allen himself had done, to a tribunal that had already reached its verdict.

"I'm not saying the boy meant to do it, mind you," he

repeated, stung to a reiteration by Allen's ominous silence. "And I'm right here to do all I can to pull him out of a hole. *My* testimony ought to have some weight."

Allen ignored Pringle's egotistic flourish. "Let's see," he mused coldly, "what time did you strike out from Walden's Glen?"

"At seven this morning."

"And it took you until nearly nine at night to make this cabin? . . . You're a mighty slow walker, if you ask me."

"The rain came on shortly after one o'clock. I thought it might let up, so I dodged into the shelter of a redwood stump near Preston's Flat. But it only grew worse. At five I decided to push on."

Suddenly Pringle stopped, chilled by the fact that Hank Allen's air of sneering incredulity was rendering devoid of substance the simplest and most truthful statements. Even in his own ears they rang out falsely. He desperately recovered himself and again took up his defense. It was terrifying how hollow even his credentials sounded, let alone the story of the day's events: a Yale B.A., a Ph.D. from Columbia, the author of *Radical Movements in Relation to Post-War Problems*—every statement he made grew more incredible, more fictitious, more hopeless. It was as if the monumental skepticism of Hank Allen were capable of destroying all reality. When he had finished, Hank Allen cleared his throat significantly.

"You'll have a mighty interesting story to tell the judge," he half sneered, half chuckled.

The brevity of Hank Allen's comment was packed with presage, and yet for a fleeting moment Walton Pringle took courage. A judge—precisely! A judge would be quite a different matter. Really, the situation was little short of absurd! In answer Hank Allen merely turned his gaze toward

the disheveled cot, and he continued to tap the table significantly with the empty handcuffs.

In the portentous silence which followed Walton Pringle's thoughts leaped to Sam Allen. Had his own skepticism of the previous hour also flattened the youth's defense? If he had listened with an open mind would the boy's far-fetched statements have held germs of reasonability? After all, what was there so extravagant in Sam Allen's tale? It could have happened just as he had said. But there was the youth's absurd escape. What point did any man have in damning himself with any move so suspicious—so futile?

As for Allen senior, what did he really think? It was almost incredible to imagine that he fancied Walton Pringle guilty. Then why the pose? Did some smoldering clan spirit in him rouse instinctively to his own flesh and blood in its extremity? Or would his son's disgrace expose his own delinquencies? The story that Pringle had listened to must merely have scratched the surface of his father's infamies. No, it was patent that Allen senior was in no position to invite the law to review his private record. . . . Yet he must know that he could but postpone the inevitable. What would happen to-morrow when the proper magistrate heard the real truth? The thought, spinning through Walton Pringle's brain, gave him a sudden feeling of boldness. After all, what had *he* to fear? He rose in his seat, all his confidence recaptured.

"Mr. Allen," he said clearly, "you are quite right. I *have* an interesting story to tell the judge. Therefore, I think the sooner I tell it the better. Shall we start back to Walden's Glen at once?"

A sardonic smile fastened itself on Pringle. He picked

up the handcuffs. "If you will oblige me—" he nodded toward Pringle's folded arms.

The faint suggestion of a chill crept over Pringle. "Do I understand, Mr. Allen, that you intend to put me to the indignity of handcuffs?" Allen shrugged. "No, I won't have it! I'll be damned if I will!"

"You won't have it? Come now, that ain't pretty talk. And it ain't reasonable talk, neither." He narrowed his eyes. "Resisting an officer of the law is sometimes a messy job, stranger."

Pringle's resistance died before the covert snarl in Allen's voice. He put out his wrists and in the next instant he felt a cold clasp of steel encircling them and heard the click of the lock. At the moment he remembered the words of Sam Allen: *"I've seen him beat 'em, too, over the head, with the butt end of a pistol—or anything else that came handy."*

And in a swift, terrible moment of revelation he knew that that was just what Hank Allen intended to do.

He fell back on the bench utterly helpless and without defense. Every story of the law's brutality that had ever reached his ears seemed to beat mockingly about him. He remembered now that not one of these tales had ever concerned an unshackled victim. No, what petty tyrants liked best was something prostrate which they could kick and trample with impunity. That was always the normal complement of bullying but in this case corruption gave the hand of authority an added incentive. Hank Allen would murder him not only for the pleasure of the performance but to save his own hide. A man struck down for resisting an officer would tell no tales. And how neatly the situation would be cleared up: a suspected murderer paying the penalty of his crime without process or expense of law. A bit

of sound judicial economy, to tell the truth, in a community not given to rating life too dearly. And he thought that he had managed it all so cleverly!

At this point he noticed that Hank Allen was intent on investigating a menacing six-shooter and his mind moved alertly past all the futile movements he could make toward defense. Where was Hank Allen planning his latest atrocity —here in Marchel Duplin's cabin or somewhere on the trail to Walden's Glen? Here in the cabin—or he missed his guess—with a litter of broken furniture to add confirmation to a tale of resistance.

His gaze swept the room with a sudden hunger for even a drab background to life, as if his soul longed to carry a homely memory with it into the impending darkness. He saw the tumbled cot, the rusting stove, the table before him with a sudden passionate sense of their rude symbolism. Even the guttering candle, almost spent, took on significance. It was the candle, blown into untimely darkness, that had paved the way for his predicament. If only his pocket flash had worked! Upon such trivialities did life itself depend! A flickering candle . . . a flickering candle . . . a flickering— The rhythmic beat of this reiteration snapped. Unconsciously he had looked past the gleam of light to the closed door and the burlap curtain, screening its shallow triangle, swaying gently in the half darkness. Abruptly candlelight, doorway, and curtain became fused into a unit—startling and lucid. Would it be possible? The prospect left him as breathless as a dash of cold water; he could hear himself gasp. Hank Allen fixed him with a suspicious glance.

"What's the matter?" he demanded brutally.

Pringle's mind cleared to a point of supreme intuition.

"I'm—I'm ill!" he gasped. "Would—would you mind opening the door—it's suffocating in here."

Hank Allen hesitated, then a diabolic humor seemed to move him to compliance. He threw back the door with a chuckle and resumed his seat. It was as if he had said, "Try it, my friend, if it amuses you!"

For a brief moment Walton Pringle closed his eyes; then quite suddenly opened them, took in a deep breath, and with a quick upward leap he blew out the candle.

Drawing himself flatly against the wall, Pringle felt the impact of the door swinging back before Allen's stumbling pursuit. It was inconceivable that a man on such good terms with subterfuge could have been tricked by anything so obvious as a slammed door. But how long would he remain tricked? He wouldn't search the hills all night, nor would he be likely to strike out for Walden's Glen without returning to the cabin. Pringle's first elation at the extraordinary success of his ruse fell before the realization of his plight. What chance had a handcuffed man in any case? And his attempt to escape—how beautifully that colored his guilt! *Innocent people were never fearful.* The memory of this mental deduction bit at him sharply. Yet with all the odds against him he felt that he must plan something and that quickly. Cautiously moving back the open door he peered over its rim. At first his vision could not pierce the gloom, but suddenly a flood of moonlight released from the imprisonment of dispersing clouds made a path of silver into the cabin. Pringle listened: everything was extraordinarily still.

All at once the silence was cracked by a keen report. A snapping fusillade answered Pringle's mental interrogation . . . He heard a shrill cry, clipped and terrible. Then

the silence fell again. . . . Presently the soft beat of cautious footfalls drifted toward the cabin. Pringle withdrew to the curtain's shelter. Something fluttered on the threshold. Then slowly, warily, the door was closed.

Pringle leaned sidewise, the tail of one eye thrust past the curtain's edge. Moonlight was flooding now even through the grimy windowpane. A shadowy form crept stealthily toward the table, halted as if sensing a living presence, turned sharply and revealed the unmistakable outlines of Sam Allen's ineffectual face.

Walton Pringle gave a cry of mingled relief and surprise and stepped from his hiding place.

The youth shrank back. "I—I wondered where you were," he gasped. He gave a little hysterical flourish with his right hand and Pringle saw that he held the stolen pistol. "Well, I'm a murderer *now!*" he spit out with quivering venom.

In a flash Pringle knew everything, and yet he could only stammer out in stupid conventional protest:

"You don't mean . . . *not your father!*"

The youth's face grew ashen. "Who else did you think?" He gave a scraping laugh. "Would *you* stand up and let him get you, if you had a chance to shoot first? I guess not. . . . Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Pringle brought his shackled wrists into the moonlight. "Damned little, I fancy!"

Young Allen put an incredulous finger on the handcuffs. "What's the idea?"

Pringle smiled ironically. "Just a little joke of your father's. He pretended he thought I was the murderer. He was for taking me back to Walden's Glen." He stopped, overcome with a passion for self-accusation, self-abasement:

"Just as I wanted to take you back. . . . Yes, on the surface he was as self-righteous and smug as I was. But he didn't fool me. I knew that he intended to murder me in cold blood—to save your hide and incidentally his. . . . Well, I blew out the candle as you did—to—to save myself."

A curious look came over Sam Allen's face. Walton Pringle had a feeling that for the second time that night he had delivered himself into the hands of the enemy.

"You were a fool to tell me that," Sam Allen drawled, with a hint of his father's biting irony in his voice. "I wouldn't have thought of such an easy way out—all by myself. . . . Yer know what I mean, don't yer?"

Pringle felt himself grow unnaturally calm. "You mean you could shoot me down and settle everything for yourself? . . . Yes, you could. Dead men tell no tales, and in this case three dead men would be even more silent than two. . . . I can't say that I blame you. I didn't give any quarter in your pinch; why should you spare me?"

Sam Allen gave an impatient cough and his words vibrated with sudden and strange maturity as he said coldly:

"I'm trying to figure it out. . . . It *would* be simpler to kill you." He held up the pistol, gazing at it with the tragic fascination of a stripling who has tasted his first victory—drawn his first blood. His whole body seemed animated with some strange new power that still struggled for foothold. Was the spirit of Hank Allen so soon fighting for a place in which to lodge its sinister corruption? . . . Suddenly he began to shiver violently. "No, it wouldn't be simpler," he half whispered—"not in the long run. . . . What do you say? Shall we go back to Walden's Glen—together?"

A faint blur dimmed Pringle's gaze. "I don't deserve it!" he cried with a vehement passion. "Upon my word, I don't!"

Sam Allen laid the pistol on the table. "Shucks!" he said simply, "everybody makes mistakes."

And at that moment Walton Pringle fancied that the pinched, yellow, wistful face before him re-created with a curiously poignant glory the face of Lizzie Allen, born Evans—the girl who had "worked out"!

LEGEND

By

Fleta Campbell Springer

THEY went by on the narrow sandy road like mounted figures out of an antique rustic frieze. Two tall, amazingly tall young women, in dark print dresses and men's straw hats, riding slowly, one after the other, on horses as exactly alike as they. Long black straps of loosened harness depended like decorations from shoulders and flanks, like brush strokes accenting the elongated lines of the riders, who sat sidewise, facing us, two-dimensional in the quiet evening light; and their dresses hung straight and full from their long fine waists to their feet. As they passed, deliberately, without haste, the measured effortless footfalls of their horses soundless on the yielding sand, the dark eyes of these women under the sun-burned down-turned brims of their identical hats rested upon us calmly, incuriously, turning evenly with their passage, impersonally, as the eyes of pictures seem to turn.

An illusion of figures coming from no imagined place, carried forward to no destination more real than the remote and inevitable termination of a myth.

They passed, but the moment endured, as if for their passage a single instant of time had prolonged itself.

Beside me, Martha on her knees before her tiny plot of flowers, so precious in that arid land, knelt upright and mo-

tionless as if she too were held by some strangeness in the air.

"Were they—" I asked, my voice rude on the stillness, "*were* they as tall as they seemed, or was it—the light?"

Martha smiled.

"No, it wasn't the light," she said. "They're just as tall as they looked."

That then, heightened as it surely was by some unnatural quality of the atmosphere, was my first impression of the two sisters known as "the Klinger girls." And I was never to see them afterward, passing as they sometimes did, not regularly but now and then on those magical windless evenings after the boisterous days, without a recurrence of that same sense of their unreality, of figures out of some heroic legend of which I knew neither the beginning nor the end. I was later to see them in other lights, at other times of day —and the illusion was still there.

Its persistence may have been partly due to the scarcity of the information I was able to elicit concerning them—a lack all the more striking in a community where the idiosyncrasies and activities of neighbors constituted almost the sole items of daily news. I had been half afraid of the commonplace details I should presently have through Martha in response to my questions about the two tall sisters. But there were no details. I had seen them pass twice, and returned to my questions a second time, before I had accumulated more than the simple facts of their name and that they lived "over on the river road."

Was it far? No, not far, but it was out of sight. You couldn't see it from here.

Was there a family? A father. Just a father and the two girls.

What was the father like?

"Like?"

Yes, was he like the daughters—tall? Yes, tall. All the Klingers were tall.

Farmer? (I don't know why I asked that in a country where no one did anything else.) Martha was going on with her work, and she answered me in the tone of the competent farmer's wife she was. Not much of a farmer, she guessed. He was away most of the time.

"Business?" I asked.

She didn't know whether you'd call it business. He was supposed to be a kind of a horse trader, she thought.

Horse trader! Why was I glad? The daughters of a horse trader—I could never have thought of it, and it seemed so exactly right. I could venture further then.

"And the daughters," I asked, "do they work somewhere? Where are they coming from when we see them passing here?"

"They've a forty down below." She nodded toward the south.

"Below where?"

"Between our land and Pierson's."

"But I thought your places adjoined, yours and Pierson's," I said. We had passed that way often enough since I had come, on our way to the Colony store—a perfectly level stretch.

"No," said Martha, "Klinger's forty lays in between."

"Queer I never noticed it," I said.

"No house on it," said Martha. "Maybe that's why. Just a little old tool shed for the plows and things."

Plows. Did the Klinger girls plow? I remembered the black straps of work-harness thrown over the horses' backs.

Well, Martha didn't know as they *plowed*—but they culti-

vated some, she guessed. Guessed they wasn't much for housework; rather be out with the horses anyhow.

I asked what they grew on that vague forty, and Martha seemed not exactly to know. They'd started, like everybody else, with grapes, but they let them go. A little of one thing, a little of another now, she thought. Mostly feed for the horses. Guessed they just about made their feed. Not much on farming, any of them.

No animosity in all this. Just an absence of interest; not even interest enough, it seemed, to wonder at my curiosity. She answered my questions as if I had asked her the time of day. Nothing offered, nothing added beyond the facts. And her work took her just then to the cellar, where I presently heard her churning busily away.

At supper that evening, with Martha's husband in his neat blue jumper sitting across from me, I brought up the Klingers again. It occurred to me suddenly to ask the sisters' names.

"Their first names?" said Martha. She seemed to ponder a bit. "Why, I don't know 's I ever *heard*. Did you, Jim? Do you know their names?"

And Jim didn't know as *he'*d ever heard. "They're always together and I never heard 'em called anything but 'the Klinger girls.' "

The subject dropped. Not a word from either of them about its being queer, their not knowing the names. Nor any curiosity as to what they were. For a moment I wondered if some scandal about the Klinger girls had produced this reticence. But that, I immediately told myself, would have produced the opposite of reticence. For scandals were rare enough in the Colony, where everybody had, as Martha said, "too much work to do to think of much devilment." It was one of those subdivisions of the vast worn-out wheat

tracts of the Pacific slope, colonized some four or five years before by all those tired, disillusioned, or tragically hopeful souls to whom the promise of owning at last a few acres of land is as the believer's promise of Paradise—and so to be labored for unceasingly to the end of life.

Strangers from everywhere a few years ago, now bound together by the same problems, the same struggles, the same antagonists—the "Company," and the stubborn resentful land. All their differences, peculiarities, their most trivial activities known and familiarly discussed. Already I knew the histories of half a dozen families.

Yet the Klingers had come with the rest, from what direction no one seemed even to have asked.

I had known foreigners to be treated in this way in country communities. But here were Tony Fuergacci, the Italian, and Chris Pierson, the Swede, whose foreign ways furnished endless comment for my hosts. And the Klingers were, so far as Martha could tell me, "just straight Americans," although, among those more stockily built sons of the soil, the Klingers with their exceptional height, their lean brown faces, and their dark bright eyes did have the look of belonging to a different race. A look also of those who live among people who speak an unknown tongue—that look of receiving impressions only through the eyes.

Perhaps somewhere, far back, there was gipsy blood. "Horse trader" suggested that. And their indifference to the land. Two forties, when the others dared but one. If they made the payments, well and good. Grazing for the horses. A spot to pitch a tent.

Indifference. That was it. Indifference to their neighbors' god. A god to be served, to be feared, to be propitiated with sacrifice. Did they follow, then, these strangers, some ritual and tradition of their own? Whatever god they

served, it was a god that left them free, a god of few demands.

Weeks passed in which we saw no more of the Klinger girls. Disappeared out of our sight and our conversation—as if they didn't exist.

And then one noon at table I was recalled from some reverie into which my thoughts had strayed, to hear Jim across from me saying something about a heifer that had "broke through the fence again."

"That heifer seems to think a poke's put on her for a dare to go through the fence. Well, I'll have to get out and hunt her this afternoon. She travels, too. Keeps right on goin' once she's out. Wish I knew which way she went."

And Martha quietly said, "Better ask the Klinger girls."

I caught the edge of her dry little smile, waited an instant and asked, "Why the Klinger girls?"

Martha glanced at Jim, still with the dry little smile.

"They're spiritualists."

"Spiritualists!" I jumped at it.

"Well, they find things," she said. "Found Orville's horses for him; didn't they, Jim?"

"It's what Orville tells," said Jim.

"Found them—how do you mean?"

They told me the tale quite casually, that very casualness giving the most unusual touch.

Several summers ago, it seemed, three of Orville's horses had strayed. He had searched the better part of two days when, going down the river road, he passed the Klinger house. The sisters were carrying water from the well, and Orville pulled up and called:

"Seen any stray horses down this way?"

They set down their buckets. No, they said. Had he

lost some horses? He told them three—a sorrel and two bays. They shook their heads; they hadn't seen anything of them, no.

Orville started on. The girls took up their buckets and started toward the house. Presently Orville heard them call; he stopped and turned in his saddle. The sisters had stopped again.

"Did you look down on the Company's lower hundred?" the nearest one called.

"No," Orville answered, he hadn't got down there yet.

"That's where they are," she said.

"Did you see 'em there?" asked Orville, astonished.

"No," she said, "but that's where they are. Right inside that big bar gate below the draw, eating the green grass. One of the bars is down."

Orville asked her some question about how she knew.

"If you go there, you'll find them," she said. And the two sisters went toward the house.

Orville didn't know why, but he turned his horse about and rode back to the corner, struck straight through to the other side of the Colony, and turned down the road that led to the "Company's lower hundred." He followed that road until he came to the draw and beyond it the big bar gate. And there were his horses, the three of them, the sorrel and the two bays, eating the long, lush grass, just inside the gate. And one of the bars was down.

That was the story. They left it there. But I had to know what they thought.

"Well," I asked, "what about it? Did they ever find out?"

"Oh, guess it's true, all right," said Jim, and began to push back his chair. "Well, got to get along. Got to find that heifer before night."

I watched him while he reached for his hat where it hung inside the kitchen door. Then as he turned to go, "Are you going to see them?" I asked.

"Who?"

"Why, the Klinger girls."

He gave me over his shoulder his slow, good-natured grin —a grin which acknowledged my little joke. Then he clapped on his hat and was gone.

Martha was clearing the table but I sat on at my place.

"So they're spiritualists," I said when she came in from the kitchen again.

"I don't know as they claim to be, but I suppose you'd call it that." And then, as if merely to illustrate the point, she told me about the message they brought to Mrs. McAllister.

I knew the McAllisters. We had seen them only the day before at the Colony store. I knew they had lost a son.

"He used to work in the City," Martha said, "and one day, about half past nine in the morning it was, Mrs. McAllister was doing her morning work and she saw the Klinger girls coming down the road—on their horses, of course—she thought on their way to the store. But pretty soon she heard a knock and there they stood, both of them. You know they don't neighbor much, and Mrs. McAllister was surprised when she come to the door. 'Your son's in trouble,' they told her, 'we thought we ought to let you know.' Mrs. McAllister was excited, of course. She kept on asking what, and they said maybe she'd better telephone.

"That was all they'd say; wouldn't say anything more. And as soon as they'd left Mrs. McAllister run all the way to Pierson's to a telephone, and got them to call up the City for her. Well, it seems her son hadn't been very well for a couple of days, and he'd took worse the night before.

They didn't tell her then, but he'd died that morning about seven o'clock. I guess that's what they meant, the Klinger girls."

"Did they say they knew it?"

"I don't know as they did. Of course Mrs. McAllister thinks he appeared to them, so they could let her know. You couldn't tell McAllisters anything else."

Martha took up her neglected stack of plates and disappeared through the kitchen door. When she came back again I said, "Why didn't you tell me all this before?"

"Why, I don't know," she said, "just never thought of it, I suppose."

Never thought of it! And all the trivial commonplace things she *had* thought of to tell about people I had never even seen! And why had none of the neighbor women happened to speak of it? Did they fear, perhaps, to be asked whether they believed it or not? Or had it really gone out of their minds? There was nothing self-conscious in Martha's lack of interest. It lay deeper, maybe, than consciousness. For beyond the remark that they were "supposed to talk to spirits," a statement for which she furnished no incident, I got no more from Martha about the Klinger girls. And again they faded out of our conversation, as if they didn't exist.

It was toward the end of the month that I went one day with Martha to register. The Company had sent round a man to see that the women were voting as well as the men. The registration clerk was a Mrs. Nichols, a widow who lived in a small frame house near the Company store, and who managed to support herself by means of a Notary Public's commission and such odd employments as this.

It was cool in her little front room and I waited there,

reading a book while Martha did her shopping at the store. It was the quiet time of the afternoon, quiet and hot outside, quiet and cool within. Mrs. Nichols was busy copying. I sat and read my book.

After a while an old man came. He planted his stick inside the door and heaved up his gnarled old body. He let himself heavily into a chair, knees apart, stick planted stoutly between, and faced Mrs. Nichols across the plain oak table with its open register. A man who had once been strong and proud of his strength, and now he was old, too old and rheumatic these many years to work. I had seen him often, sitting outside in the yard at a certain place we passed—always the same chair, the same spot under the tree. Yet there was still strength in his voice when he answered the questions put to him:

"Name?"

"John Delavoy Todd."

"Age?"

"Eighty-six." A touch of challenge, a touch of pride.

"Occupation?"

"Laborer," out full and strong.

The pen paused a moment above the white page of the register, then wrote it down. Laborer. A brave and beautiful word. Yet the hands that grasped his stick were stiff with age and uselessness.

There were other questions, other replies, but I did not hear the rest. And then he went, with an old-fashioned "Good day, ma'am" for each of us, and a kind of loneliness in his eyes.

There was quiet again in the little front room. Mrs. Nichols went back to her copying, I to my book.

Ten minutes had passed, perhaps, when a shadow darkened the door and I glanced quickly up.

One of the Klinger girls stood inside. Tall and quiet she stood, in her dark print dress, and regarded us silently from under the down-turned brim of her hat. Something disconcerting in the calm regard of those live dark eyes, like the eyes of a creature unused to spaces so small as this in which she suddenly found herself.

"You came to register?"

She nodded as if the question were superfluous.

"The full name, please." The widow dipped and poised her pen.

"Charlotte Klinger."

The voice was like her; I cannot say quite how. A gentle voice; I do know that. So much did it seem a part of her that I did not even think of it till afterward. As I did not, till afterward, think of her face. A lean brown face that only suggested to me how much like their father those daughters must look.

She made her answers deliberately, without hesitation, and yet with the slightest curious pause before each one, as if the question took that time to cross the space to her.

"Age?"

"Twenty-nine."

"Address?"

The pause. "Colony Station, R. F. D. 2."

She watched the pen moving on the white page of the register.

"Occupation?"

Again the pause; and then—

"Cartoonist," she calmly, astoundingly said.

There was a moment of utter silence in the little room. The widow's pen hung motionless above the page.

"You said—" she helplessly began.

"Cartoonist." No irony in the tone and no perverse

intent. Instead, a kind of withdrawn self-possession and reserve. She had been asked. She told. And now repeated it.

Without even looking up or any further questioning, the widow wrote it down.

There came suddenly into my mind an advertisement I had seen in a magazine: "Be a Cartoonist! Can You Draw?" The name of a city, and post-office box. How many dreams had sprung to life at such chance words? How many saw themselves the thing they wished to be? Those muscular brown hands, so sure to guide a horse, might hold the feel of line—of form. "Cartoonist" though! Did some ironic humor lurk behind that grave exterior?

The routine questions and answers were going on, and one stood suddenly out. "Party affiliation," the question was. She waited a moment at that, and then, as one who seeks to comply with some request almost forgotten but now recalled, she said, "Democrat."

Only a shade less incongruous than "Cartoonist" it seemed from her. A shade *more* incongruous even it might have seemed in another place than this. "Cartoonist" and "Democrat," from the lips of surely as fearless and pagan a creature as ever walked the earth.

It was laughable. But we did not laugh. For there was somehow a touch of pathos in it too. Indeed when she had gone, taking her leave with as little ceremony as she had come, pausing an instant against the light for her laconic "good-by," we did not speak of her at all.

I do not know why I asked no questions of Mrs. Nichols —except that I felt she knew no more than I. And she ventured no comment of her own. "Cartoonist"—"laborer" —they called to each other in my mind—while I sat pretending to read my book.

And presently Martha came with a bevy of neighbor

women to register. And the little front room was filled with their laughter and sociability.

That night I said nothing about the incident of the afternoon. I did not even mention seeing one of "the Klinger girls." Yet I should have thought it strange enough if Martha had withheld that incident from me. Was I also to become a part of that conspiracy of reticence?

Never did I hear the word "Cartoonist" in connection with the Klinger girls. And never, from that day to this, has it been explained.

Yet I thought of it in the days that followed whenever I thought of them in that indefinite region where they lived "over on the river road"—a region inhabited only by those vague shapes with whom, so it was said, "they talked."

The summer passed and I went away, to return the following year. And when I came it was to find the Colony astir with a thing that had happened a week before.

A man had been killed, a murder done—and the Klingers were accused.

The Colony was astir as a forest is stirred, not by a breeze in the branches but when the roots have felt a tremor of the earth.

This was what was known. About four o'clock on an afternoon ten days before, two Company officials out on Colony business and driving down the river road, had noticed as they passed the Klinger place the sisters standing in the yard. Farther on they had met two horses galloping toward them, up from the river, to which the road leads down. The horses swerved and passed them, and they kept on.

As they entered the woods that line the river banks they had come upon a light wagon drawn off at the side of the road, the harness lying as if it had been hastily dropped.

Grass was trampled, the underbrush disturbed. A few feet farther, where the trees were thickest, they had heard, or thought they heard, a sound; and sensing trouble, had left the car to investigate.

In an open space between two trees a poorly dressed old man, a stranger, lay dead on the ground, his skull crushed in —and over him stood the father of the Klinger girls.

He made no attempt to escape. But he stepped back when he saw them and said quietly, "He's dead."

They could see he was not armed, but near by on the ground lay a heavy stick, one end of it covered with blood. And there was blood on the horse trader's hands.

Questioned, his statements had become immediately conflicting and confused. Two strange men, he said, had killed the old man, robbed him, and got away. Asked if he had seen it, he said no, they had got away before he arrived. Asked how he knew they had robbed him, he said, "Because he had a roll of bills."

"Who was he?" they asked, and he said he didn't know; the man was unconscious when he got there, and he'd never seen him before.

At this they had told Klinger he had better come with them to the authorities; and he went, willingly enough apparently. Once there he was immediately put under arrest. At first they had thought he was going to resist; but when they had snapped the handcuffs on his wrists he had calmed down at once and asked them to send for his daughters.

At the Klinger place the two horses that had been seen galloping up the river road, and that evidently belonged to the murdered man, were found in the corral. The girls did not deny having taken them up. And within two hours both father and daughters were in custody—all three protesting their innocence.

This was the story they told. This the horse trader's remarkable alibi. Between three and four o'clock that afternoon, the sisters said, they had been together in the back part of the house. They had just finished washing dishes and were standing by the sink when they had "seen" (it was the word they used, although it would have been impossible for them really to have seen from there)—they had "seen" something happening down by the river. An old man driving a wagon was being attacked by two men who had suddenly appeared at the side of the road. They saw the wagon stop, saw the old man lean down to answer some question, saw one leap and seize him from behind while the other attempted to go through his pockets; saw the old man put up a fight, saw them drag him from his wagon, struggling; saw them drag him, still struggling, into the trees, and one hold him while the other found a club, a fallen limb of a tree; saw him come up from behind and fell the old man with a single blow; saw them take a roll of bills from his pocket and, leaving him bleeding on the ground, run back to the wagon, unhook the horses, fling down the harness, and ride away.

Seeing this, they said, they had run out and called to their father, who they thought was in the barn; but he had gone to the pasture to mend a fence. They had found him there, told him what they had seen, and he had hurried across the fields to the river the shortest way.

The father corroborated this story. His daughters had come to him in the field, told him what they had seen, and he had gone to be of help.

And they continued to stay by the story through repeated grillings, through the inquest, through the Grand Jury proceedings which resulted in the indictment of the father for murder, with the daughters held as material witnesses. Why

not accomplices I could not quite see, since their story was naturally held to be valueless by the authorities. Perhaps they thought it wise to avoid arousing sympathy for the daughters, who were better known than their father in the community.

There were elaborations of the story, of course; details gathered from all sides. The sisters had furnished descriptions of the two men they claimed to have seen. One, they said, was short and thin and "wiry-like," the other one taller and heavier, with long arms. They both wore slouch felt hats and were roughly dressed, "like hoboes," they said, "like tramps." The short one was in his shirt sleeves with a vest, a "kind of striped shirt," and wore elastic sleeve-holders, brown, with nickel snaps. The other one wore a coat. They saw them plainly, they said, and would recognize them anywhere. But no pair answering their description could be found.

They had also said, in describing the fight, that the old man had "a kind of stiff knee." And this was later discovered to have been true, which supported of course the prosecution's theory that the murdered man was not unknown to them. The implications were plain: Klinger, the horse trader, in a quarrel with an old man whose horses he had determined to have—a sturdy team that would bring a good price in a district where good work horses were at a premium. Or the old man, who had appeared from nowhere apparently (so far as their tracings could find) might have been the victim of an ancient grudge. An itinerant trader himself, perhaps. That would account for his being unknown. No relatives claimed him, although the murder was published far and wide.

Two weeks went by before they found a clue. A man answering his description and who walked with a peculiar

gait because of a stiffness of one knee had stayed, with his horses and wagon, the night preceding the tragedy at one of those "Feed Yard" hostelries that still exist unnoticed in the side streets of some towns, at the County Seat. But at such hostelries there is no register, and men are not required to tell their names. They buy feed, camp the night, and in the morning pass on.

But a chance word dropped that night led to the discovery that such a man had lived for a time in a certain isolated foothill district in the southern end of the state. He had occupied a small tenant farm, living alone in a little shack, and driven occasionally in to the village for groceries and supplies. Little was known of him except that he was supposed to have come from "the City," and that his name was Lee. About a month before he had left the community —it was supposed to return to the city again—but no one could be found to whom he had spoken of his plans. At any rate he had driven away with the wagon and team—immediately recognized by a neighbor, brought north for the purpose by the authorities, as the wagon and team of the murdered man. And the identification was complete. But there it stopped. They had discovered nothing but his name. Whatever past he had was lost in mystery.

The trial was set for the last week in July. No move was made by the defense for a delay—the lawyer employed by the Klingers deciding apparently to offer the story of his clients, however fantastic and irregular it seemed, relying perhaps upon that very quality for its effect. It was all that he could do, since his clients stood stubbornly by their story, refusing to consider a more reasonable defense. Not a word of corroboration had appeared. No trace of the two men the sisters claimed to have "seen."

The Colony talked but little. But the thing was there in their silences. When they talked at all it was casually, as if they were not too much concerned.

Jim, reading the news, would only shake his head and say, "Looks bad for 'em, pretty bad."

The time drew near and witnesses were summoned to appear.

Orville was summoned—Orville, whose horses the Klinger girls had "found." Mr. and Mrs. McAllister were called.

On the third day of the trial, held at the County Seat, I decided to go in. The state had presented its case with telling brevity: merely established the crime, offered the testimony of the two Company officials as to the finding of the defendant on the scene of the murder with blood on his hands, the confusing statements he had made; as to their seeing the sisters standing in the yard, and as to the horses of the murdered man found in the Klinger corral; established the fact that the defendant spent much of his time away from home, and that he made frequent trips to the City, that same City from which the mysterious Lee was said to have come. Here the State had abruptly rested its case, at about half past two o'clock of the second day, leaving the defense to offer, if they chose, that unprovable and fantastic alibi. And that, with a kind of hopeless haste disguised as confidence, the attorney for the defense had proceeded at once to do. Immediately, without even consulting his clients, he had called one of the sisters to the witness-stand where she had told her story without a single deviation from its original details. Then, with a counter-thrust of brevity, he had turned the witness over for cross-examination by the State. But the State's attorney had merely smiled and said "No questions" with the easy tolerance of one who wastes no words upon the obvious.

The defendant himself had followed his daughter to the stand and was still being questioned when the session came to an end.

It was the next day, then, that I decided to go in. There was a train from the Colony station at twelve o'clock, and one back in the evening at four. I spoke of it at breakfast, and within an hour Martha and Jim had remembered some buying they had to do in the County Seat, and had decided to go along. They might, they said, step round to the trial themselves for a few minutes if they got through their buying in time. Still that necessity to pretend a casual interest!

A hot ride in the train, a hot walk through blistering unshaded streets, and I reached the courthouse at two o'clock. It seemed almost dark in the dim corridors after the blinding glare outside. An eddy of movement, of interest, led me to the courtroom door.

Air seemed to stop at that door. Inside, pressed forward, packed to the very walls and standing up, the silent attentive crowd strained forward toward the farther end of that room. Green blinds shut out the sun but not the light. The stifling heat of a thicket on summer afternoons.

The quarry brought to cover. The hunt gathered in at the death. And above on his bench the Judge, white-haired and rubicund, the master of the hunt—with a flower in his buttonhole.

Below him with their counsel, the defendant and his daughters, side by side. The father, once as tall as his daughters, a little shrunken now. The three dark heads. The dark bright eyes. Now more than ever they looked like creatures brought to bay. Watchful, expectant, still. On the table before them, their three identical hats.

Some colloquy was going on between the State's attorney and the Judge. The Judge leaned down from his bench to

hear. The State's attorney—thin, keen, immaculate—stepped back with an amused little smile on his lips and spoke in his sharp, incisive voice.

"Miss Klinger for re-cross." Then added in a lower tone, "Miss Charlotte Klinger, please, will you take the stand again."

She rose without haste and made her way past the counsel tables, mounted the two shallow steps to the witness-chair between the Jury and the Judge. The familiar dark print dress invested her now with a curious simple dignity. Her hat lay on her lap—her strong black hair brushed back and gathered in a knot, as women do their hair who always wear a hat. She was handsomer than I had thought, and just a little strange.

Her eyes went to her lawyer, busy shuffling papers and untangling his glasses from the black ribbon by which they hung; then rested upon the attorney for the State.

"I believe, Miss Klinger," his tone was easy, conversational, "I believe you testified in your direct examination that you and your sister found the defendant, your father, mending fence in the pasture, and that he left you there to go to the scene of the tragedy?"

I noted again that odd effect of the question having to reach her first.

"Yes, sir," she said. And again her voice was like her, gentle but perfectly audible in the attentive stillness of that room.

"Were you not afraid—did you not think it might be dangerous for him to go alone to such a place?"

The pause. "Yes, sir, we didn't like to see him go alone."

"Then why did you and your sister not go along?"

"It was men's work," she said.

"I see." His voice was even softer now, more persua-

sively significant. "You didn't like him to go alone; you felt it might be dangerous. Why, then, did you not go for help when your father failed to return?"

Again the pause. "We would," she said, "but we saw the Company men go down and thought it was all right."

The State's attorney sent a look to the counsel for the defense—the look of a sportsman who cries "Good!" at his adversary's clever play.

Then he turned to the witness again. His tone was crisper now.

"About these men you claim to have seen. You have testified both on direct and cross examination that you saw, in some way saw, two unidentified men attack, kill, and rob the deceased. Will you kindly tell the Court what words, if any, passed between them during those events. Did you not also hear them *speak?*"

"We never hear," she calmly said, "we only see."

"Then see them *now!* Where are they *now?*"

"Objection!" cried the counsel for defense. "No testimony has been offered as to the present whereabouts of these two men."

The Judge leaned forward across the bench. He silently lifted a book, and silently laid it down. Then he lifted another and laid it atop the first. Then slowly and judiciously he spoke.

"The Court has had occasion to admit into the record of this case certain—unusual evidence. The Court has been governed in this course by the highly peculiar nature of the defense here offered. Evidence has been offered concerning an alleged 'vision' claimed to have been had by this witness, and upon this evidence defendant seeks to base an alibi. The Court deems it therefore only fair to afford this witness an opportunity to prove to this jury her alleged clairvoyant

power. The Court therefore overrules the objection of the defendant, and requests the witness to state whether or not, since the alleged first vision of which she has testified, she has ever, clairvoyantly or otherwise, seen those two men again."

His eyes met those of the girl in the witness chair.

Slowly her eyes left his.

"No," her answer came, almost inaudibly.

He leaned toward her across his folded arms.

"*Try*—try to see them now."

The whole room held its breath.

And upon that stillness her gentle, despairing answer fell.

"We never *can* see when we try. We've *been* trying ever since."

It lay upon that stillness like the weightless hand of truth.

At last, as if from some vision he himself had seen, the Judge drew slowly back.

"Proceed," he said.

"No more questions," said the attorney for the State.

"No questions," echoed the counsel for defense.

"That's all," said the Judge.

The girl in the witness-chair rose.

"One moment!" The State's attorney raised his hand. "One more question, please, just one."

He waited while she took the chair again. Waited then a moment before he spoke in that deliberately slow and careful voice.

"You and your sister are—very much devoted to your father, are you not?"

"Yes, sir," she said, and seemed to wait.

"That's all," said the attorney for the State.

She waited still until he said again, "That's all"—and then, bewildered, rose and made her way down from the witness stand, past the long counsel tables to her vacant chair.

"Next witness!" called the Judge, matter of fact, peremptory.

A stir ran through the court. It breathed again.

"Mrs. McAllister!" announced the counsel for the defense and stood to receive her as she came through the crowd, a nervous little figure in her Sunday best.

Nervous but determined, she took her place and faced the court. Led by the kindly questioning, her voice growing steadier as she gained confidence, she began to tell the story of the message brought to her by the Klinger girls.

The attorney for the State seemed bored. Presently he arose.

"I object, your Honor, to this testimony as incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial."

"What is the purpose of the testimony of this witness?" asked the Judge.

"The purpose, your Honor," said the counsel for defense, "assigned by the Court in overruling my objection a few moments ago."

Again the look of sportsmen passed between the lawyers—and the witness was allowed to proceed as before. She told her story simply, in homely poignant words that somehow touched the heart. And when she had finished and counsel said, "Take the witness," the State's attorney was kindness itself, as one who regrets a duty unavoidable.

"Tell me, Mrs. McAllister, have you any means of knowing that these young women did not receive some word of your son's death before they came to you?"

"Oh, no, but they didn't!" she cried.

"But have you any *means* of knowing it?"

"They couldn't have," she said.

He did not press the point but left it there.

"You say, Mrs. McAllister, that until your son went to the city he had lived with you in the Colony?"

She nodded, "Yes."

"Did he know the two young women called 'the Klinger girls'?"

She seemed to hesitate at that. "Why yes, sir, I suppose he did."

"Intimately?" The word picked out between two silences.

"Oh no, sir! I don't think he knew them much at all."

The prosecutor's brows went up. There showed upon his firm thin lips a faint, uncomfortable smile. He leaned a little forward now.

"What did your son die of, Mrs. McAllister?"

"Why," she said and wavered, then went on, "he just hadn't been feeling right for a couple of days, and all of a sudden that last night he took worse, and in the morning he died. It was his stomach, though—he must have eaten something, the doctor said."

"And before that, had he been well?"

"Oh yes, sir! He was a fine strong boy."

"Do you know whether or not during that week your son had received any visitors?"

"Visitors?"

"*Women* visitors, perhaps. . . ."

Something black had entered the court. Something black and malevolent. He, that cool and alert intelligence; he, the destroyer of visions—what were these but "visions" he himself produced! From what cold diabolical chamber had they sprung?

Through them came the voice of counsel for the defense, booming his objections to the court. "No evidence has been offered here—no evidence has been offered!"

"Objection sustained!" said the court. But the "vision" was not exorcised.

"That's all," said the State's attorney.

"All," echoed counsel for the defense.

"You may go, Mrs. McAllister," said the Judge.

And the meager timid figure, brave in its Sunday best, also went bewildered from the stand.

Next came Orville, a knot of a man, who faced the questioner with sullen belligerence. For Orville had come against his will. "He'd be damned," Orville had said, "if he was goin' to be made a fool of in a court of law." But he was also afraid of lying in a "court of law." So he answered his questions in monosyllables. "Sure," he would answer, scratching his scraggly white mustache—"sure they told me where to look." And this with averted knowing eyes, as if he would have liked to add, "I s'pose they *put* 'em there." For here was a man who had told his story until he thought it was a lie, embarrassed now to have it proven true.

The State's attorney waited for him, smiling to himself.

At counsel's "Take the witness," I felt a touch upon my arm. Martha stood beside me, saying we must go if we were to catch the train.

I asked how long they had been here and she said they had just come in a few minutes ago. But I always wondered how long those "few minutes" might have been.

As we stepped from that long dim corridor out into the street, the blazing ball of the sun before us blinded us with light.

We talked little of the trial. I could only echo Jim's eloquent "Looks bad for 'em—pretty bad."

And so it did. And so it was "bad for 'em" in the end.

The verdict came in Friday. "Guilty," as any sane jury would have said. Twenty years in prison for the father. The daughters let go free.

"They did their best to save him," everybody said.

"Twenty years!" said Martha, "That's as good as life."

And so it was, or so it would have been if there had not happened then the strangest thing of all. To me at least it seemed the strangest thing—and somehow strangely right.

For the horse trader did not go to prison after all. Oh, nothing supernatural—he was not spirited away. He took a cold, as you or I might do, in that overheated stuffy court and, within a week after the verdict, was dead of pneumonia.

The season of boisterous days and magical windless evenings after them had come again to the Colony. Again Martha tended her precious bed of flowers, and again in the quiet evening light I saw them coming, "the Klinger girls," exactly as I had seen them first—riding their strong deliberate horses along the narrow sandy road. Sidewise, facing us, their dark print dresses hanging straight and full from their long fine waists to their feet. And as they passed, the measured effortless footfalls of their horses fell soundless on the yielding sand, their dark eyes rested upon us calmly, turning evenly with their passage as the eyes of pictures seem to turn.

"Good-by!" It was Martha's voice.

"Good-by!" They echoed in unison. And rode on.

Beside me, Martha on her knees was motionless, as if held by the strangeness of that good-by.

"They're going away," said Martha, her voice soft on the stillness.

"Away?"

She nodded. "They say *he* wants them to."

I could still see them a moment before they vanished in the quiet evening light. An illusion of figures carried forward to no destination more real than the remote and unimaginable termination of a myth.

WOMEN COME TO JUDGMENT

By

Margaret Culkin Banning

THE four women entered together from the jury room, conscious that they created a stir among the spectators already gathered there. Women taking some of the places always previously allotted to twelve men good and true were still a novelty, and in such a case as this their appearance had heightened interest. Mrs. David Brown led as one used to public appearances and with the look on her face that had called many a club meeting to order. After her, yet with no air of following, appeared Mrs. James Farwell in her smooth street costume of tan covert cloth and with the calm surety of glance which matches unassailable social position. The other two women were of different bearing. Alpha Long, the music teacher, wore a black crêpe dress and a black hat that were indefinably bizarre, and took her place without a glance at the courtroom, the disdainful melancholy of her face seeming to leave the whole present business outside her thought. The last woman to come in was nervous. A quivering, conscious half-smile came and went on her face and she stepped along self-consciously. Under her drooping feather hat, soft loose brown hair and pale blue eyes made a picture of an outdated ingénue.

They all sat together in the box and beside them the gentlemen of the jury—recruited from here and there into a

strange body without homogeneity except this transient relation to the case—settled themselves, observing the lawyers, reporters, and court officers, and affecting indifference to the people crowding the spectators' benches of the court-room to hear the beginning of the sensational Holden trial.

It was not, as Mrs. Farwell knew, going to be a pleasant case. She had known it when she was called to jury duty and her husband had immediately suggested pulling a wire or two to remove her. At first it had not entered her mind to serve. The beginning of the summer season with its constant week-endings, the absolute necessity of getting up her golf before the State Tournament, all made it awkward. Besides, she considered that she was not one of the kind of women who served on juries. She had never heard of anyone whom she knew doing it yet. A few had been called but ill-health or some excellent excuse had always released them promptly. Moreover, the case was ugly. Henry Holden had been well known as a rake. That was no news to Nell Farwell, though she had hardly seen Holden for years. But she had no prurient curiosities about the sort of business involved here. She disliked sexy trials and heady scandals, and always skipped them in the newspapers. Like her face, her mind was finely cut and delicate. It wore no mental negligees. All that being true, she was amazed at herself, fingering the printed summons to jury duty, to hear herself say: "They talk, Jim, about a jury of peers. That's what they ought to have. I think I will serve."

Jim had laughed and said, "Oh, well, you'll be challenged anyway. You knew Holden and they'll never let that get by."

"I didn't know him especially well," answered his wife, "and I haven't seen him in years."

And here, despite Jim's prophecies, she was; duly sworn in, one of those who was selected to judge whether Henry Holden was to be punished for depravity or not. The prosecuting attorney she knew but slightly as a clever lawyer whom one saw now and then at big affairs. The other attorney, he of the defense, she knew rather better. Neither had challenged her. The prosecuting attorney had looked her over carefully, probingly, and let her stay. Alpha Long was not challenged. Mrs. Brown, well known for her civic abilities, had been sharply questioned by the defense but had passed at last, probably because they had exhausted their challenges. The other woman seemed to have slid in. There seemed to be no reason, unless one took exception to the weak look of her, the slipshod prettiness, why she should not serve.

Things moved slowly. The preliminaries of the trial—pompous, elaborate, ceremonious—amused Mrs. Farwell. Rigmarole. She began to wish they would get at the business in hand. She watched Henry Holden, looking so extraordinarily unlike a criminal, talking to his lawyers. He appeared very lawyerlike himself—smooth, partly gray hair, well-made, expensive clothes. She thought of his daughter. What a shame it was! How the city—that little upper fragment of it in which Nell Farwell moved—had buzzed with talk of all this. It must be hard on the girl. Mrs. Farwell could not remember ever having seen her. Her own sons were of a different age and she had become bewildered among the recent crops of debutantes. Not that Holden's daughter had made a debut. With a mother dead and a father who was addicted to his clubs and his pleasures, she couldn't have had much of a chance. And Holden never did have much money—at least not for long.

The eyes of the courtroom drew together on the Wallace

girl, who came in martialed by the woman police officer, who had made all the trouble. The policewoman in dark blue suit and hat was a thick blue outline—the girl beside her so ordinary a type as hardly could rouse interest. A Saturday-night girl, a meet-you-on-the-corner girl, with a face that had been pulled at and fussed at before a little strip of mirror somewhere until one hardly knew how it had begun or what the outline its creator intended must have been. A shock of bobbed hair, frizzed by over-hot irons at the bottom until it stood out roughly, a row of pimples on one cheek, thick lips undoubtedly closed over imperfect teeth, eyes darkened and with eyebrows that had been thinned to a wavering line. And yet, like so many of those waifs of fashion, those tag ends of maidenhood, she sported a grace of a sort, an allure of a kind in her underfed little body that was so thin. The policewoman had no doubt dictated her clothes to some extent. She wore a simple enough sleeveless sweater and a black felt hat. But no social worker had ever adjusted the hat to that angle over her eye. That was experience.

She took the place allotted her, swung her head a little defiantly as she caught sight of Holden, who ignored her utterly. The court resumed order. Formality proceeded. The jurors sought for attitudes of comfort which would not belie their dignities. Mrs. Hetherington, the elaborately named blond woman, fidgeted. Her hands strayed to her mouth, her hair, her ears—she adopted brief poses as if in constant search of one that would suit her permanently. And she wearied Mrs. Farwell, who was perforce sitting next to her. Alpha Long sloped into relaxation on the other side, with her chronic condemning glance of irony. Alpha, thought Mrs. Farwell, put that look on ten years ago when chances of matrimony waned and certainties of music lessons

waxed. It's a mask, a refuge. She must say that to some one about Alpha. It was good enough.

They adjourned for lunch to a hotel across from the courthouse, a place which Mrs. Farwell had hardly known to exist, a family hotel, where she sawed patiently at mutton chops and drank rather rank tea and tried to eat a stringy romaine salad without success. But deep in her something was enjoying the whole business. This was different living from her common kind. It gave her release from the multiplicity of engagements which held her, all so much alike and so perfectly anticipated in advance. She had no time for exploration among people or among things in the course of her activities.

"How did you get roped in, Alpha? Couldn't you find any excuse?"

"I'm not the startling figure in this case," Alpha gave back in her ironic drawl. "It's you. You quite eclipse the prisoner."

"We are so glad to have such a representative group of women on the jury," said Mrs. Brown, speedily. "At a time like this when women are forced to be in the public eye, so much depends on what women represent us. You know what I mean, I'm sure."

That was what it was like, the first talk between the women during their brief recesses, talk which only served to point out the gulfs which separated them, the incongruity of their thoughts and their very presences. Each of them lived by a separate code, if indeed Mrs. Dale Hetherington, with her droops and affectations and her sheep's eyes at the men in the courtroom, could be imagined to have any code at all.

Mrs. Farwell forgot her companion jurors when the trial was in progress. The thing itself with its strangely arranged

drama, with its battle of realities masked even here by appearances, absorbed her. The girl, Ethel Wallace, became a weapon in the hand of the policewoman. One caught the woman's point of view in her brief, controlled statements. She was fighting against corruption not for Ethel Wallace especially, but for a host of young girls. Nor were young girls merely young girls to her—soft, gay, light-thinking bits of underdevelopment. They were factors in society, just as men like Holden were a menace to society. The police officer gave a curious impression of being repelled by Ethel Wallace as she sat beside her. Ethel grew restless. She shifted and turned and tried to look abused and pathetic, and concentrated her gaze most easily on a young reporter who sat not too far distant.

They put her on the stand and she wept noisily but pathetically, answering questions with some bungling. She was an unfortunate girl—yes, not quite sixteen. She was strangely bereft of shame at her position. Perhaps it had not ever grown in her—any kind of shame—was stunted by her life. The jurors had already heard about her home. Four girls had come out of it and two of them were in the State Reformatory now. The counsel for the defense brought that out roundly. Ethel Wallace herself was a poor witness and the prosecution knew it. There was about her a look of the streets, a look of sophistication that militated against her case. But there was one thing she must bring out and she did that unhesitatingly. She was sure of the day that Holden had asked her to his office. It was Memorial Day, in the afternoon. So easy to visualize, as she told it. One might not trust the girl in other ways, but there was a very commonness about the tale that verified it. One saw the parade of the veterans and school children, the crowds on the street, the abandonment of industry in the cause of high

remembrance; and, floating about, those to whom the day meant nothing, to whom the old blue-coated soldiers, so proud of their places of honor in the parade, were no symbol. Memorial Day was to Ethel Wallace only a day when you didn't have to work. She had escaped the department-store basement, where she usually wrapped packages all day long, and had tumbled from her wretched, clamorous home into the street, her black felt hat jauntily on one side, her gum in her cheek, and her roving eyes searching the crowd for amusement that she wouldn't have to pay for. For she couldn't pay for her own amusement. She hadn't any money.

Not only street loafers but men like Holden sometimes established the link between a good time and a drifting idle girl who wouldn't go home. Holden had seen the girl outside a soda shop in the afternoon. Then he had enticed her into his office—so ran the charge. It was all very specific. The policewoman, so often baffled in her fights with evils of society by being unable to be specific, must have been very grateful for that.

This was the sort of thing that Mrs. James Farwell passed by in her reading when she scanned her newspapers, and indeed, like many women, she prided herself in passing it by mentally as well as visually. One had to keep one's mind off that sort of wretchedness, that sort of perversion. There could be decency in scandal as well as anything else, and if one must have scandal one had to keep to decent scandals, especially those which involved one's own crowd or higher crowds. Yet here were Mrs. Farwell and Mrs. Brown, that pattern of civic virtue, sitting in judgment on the kind of case from which they turned their minds.

Nell Farwell felt somewhat soiled and disgusted by the whole debasing business. Jim had been right. She was a

fool to come down here and let herself in for this sort of nauseating discussion. She found herself stirring like the fidgety woman beside her as the defendant's lawyer probed and prodded the girl, trying to shake her testimony in the two things that mattered: the question of the day of the occurrence and whether she had been a moral girl before Memorial Day. The latter was for effect on the jurors. It did not affect the statute. But Ethel Wallace was pertly sure of herself. She didn't mind the whole business as much as the jurors. And she insisted that she was under sixteen. There was a to-do about that also. But it was proved that Ethel had been born decently in a hospital and the hospital showed her incontestably under sixteen years. The probation officer had made sure of that too. On her stern face, worn like rough stone with the washings of sin against it, was some slight triumph. Mrs. Farwell was distinctly sorry for her. To spend a life hearing so much viciousness, so much dreary sin! This was sin unlit by any of the rosier glow that circumstance and clothing can sometimes give it.

She was grateful for the mid-afternoon recess. The jurors sat in the "ladies' parlor" in high-backed rockers bought by the county commissioners with some thought of giving the women jurors ease. They were fusing now, the four women, fusing in thought of the case. Only the case mattered to each of them.

"A bold girl," said Mrs. Hetherington, and simpered a little, "not a nice girl at all, I'm sure. One has only to look at her to know she is not nice."

"But you have to look also at the things that she has been looking at for years," said Alpha, and put her pointed chin thoughtfully in the cup of her hand. Alpha was losing

her expression of scorn. In its place was a drearier look but a truer one.

"Mr. Holden doesn't look that sort of a man," ventured Mrs. Hetherington further.

Nell Farwell's glance raked her.

"You mean because he wears clothes made by Millet?"

"They say that his daughter is going to appear," broke in Mrs. Brown, hastily. "I have never seen her, have you?"

"But why?"

"Some point in the evidence."

"It's a rotten place to have a young girl."

"There's one young girl in there now," said Alpha; "I really don't see why one should spare the other, if she has anything to contribute."

It was clear that afternoon that things were going not too well for Holden. And yet the probability was that he would be cleared. Actually the thing was too serious: the charge too serious and the girl too light. How can one send to prison for several years a man who looks like Holden, when a fly-by-night girl accuses him of something which was only too likely to happen to her anywhere, anyhow? Back of Holden, like a protecting power, stood years of conformance to social amenities, years of business connection, acquaintance even with the judge who presided. The thing was unreasonable as it stood—to send him to prison, to knock a great hole in the wall of social structure, to admit that such crimes existed. The group of men around Holden was so suave, so bland and grave. Perfect lawyers. Yet opposite them, grimly, sat the woman police officer, fighting, and in her hand the weapon of law upraised and sustained by evidence. She was sternly quiet, her reddened hands upon her lap—all the blood in her body running into them it seemed, for her face was drained of color. Now and then

the prosecuting attorney spoke to her. He and she ignored Ethel Wallace. And Ethel Wallace tilted her hat and surreptitiously rubbed at her cheeks with a sodden pad of felt. The day was over. Court adjourned and Mrs. Farwell telephoned for Hector to bring the car. She took Alpha with her and left her at the studio apartment where Alpha lived. They rode silently.

"How long will it last, do you suppose?" asked Alpha.

"Surely—in another day they should have finished."

That showed their ignorance of court procedure and legal spinning. Wednesday came and went—Thursday. By Thursday night it was hard for Mrs. Farwell to remember definitely what had happened on each day. It seemed to her that she had been sitting for weeks on end watching Ethel Wallace and learning about a mire and swamp of immorality surrounded by a barbed-wire fence of law over which one might climb if one were careful, under which one might slip if skillful; men making grave play of their own indignities. And for years and years—forever, she thought—in civilized countries judgments on these matters which involve the lives and spirits of women have been exclusively in the hands of men. Is it so that Ethel Wallaces have been made?

It came to her that this policewoman, whom she would have passed on the street a thousand times without notice, was waging a battle for women and that women should be actually on her side—that they were very lazy. Lazy and reluctant as she was now, with her mind diving off to hope that the case would be over to-day so that by to-morrow she would have time to have a decent "facial" before the Wards' dinner. She simply could not go to that dinner if this thing strung along. She didn't have the courage with this obsessing her.

Holden's daughter had not appeared. The case was now a maze of details circling around the questions of the Wallace girl's morals: objections, overrulings, irrelevant witnesses. Mrs. Hetherington and Mrs. Brown seemed to enjoy it more than Alpha Long and Nell Farwell. Mrs. Hetherington, protesting in recesses that she was a "home body" and that things of this "nature" disturbed her so much, had become an object of complete scorn to the other women. Besides, she ogled the men jurors, she reset her hat and her hair whenever anyone looked at her, and she took pains to make people look at her. There was a fat man, a well-known butcher, on the jury, and he was persistently chivalrous to Mrs. Hetherington. The others could hear her limpid little giggle rise to the surface as she talked with him. Mrs. Brown was enjoying the experience as an extension of her social conscience, said Alpha *sotto voce* to Mrs. Farwell. It would make a departure for many a speech—a fine talking point. The hours dragged on, and always there remained the question—would the Holden girl appear or not? Of course she must. Holden claimed that on the afternoon of Memorial Day he had been with his daughter, Sylvia.

Friday was hot. Even Nell Farwell's excellent breakfast did not start the day off properly at all. She looked out at the cool flowering shrubs blossoming around the great windows of her breakfast room and was utterly reluctant to leave such a place for the courtroom with its stifling, salacious atmosphere. Jim kept teasing her about the whole concern and her friends took it so lightly as to try to gossip with her about it. She shut them off shortly. That sort of thing was impossible.

She entered the courtroom with a slightly heightened air of *hauteur,* and a young reporter who was there early

(because he had been tipped off that Sylvia Holden would take the stand and he wanted the sensation for an afternoon edition) drew a sketch of Mrs. Farwell as she sat there—then, emboldened by his success in getting that stiff look of reserve, he drew Mrs. Hetherington with a few curves and Mrs. Brown with a few angles and Alpha with a soft black lead smear, and passed it over to the court clerk who found it highly amusing.

Then Sylvia Holden came in and everything else in the courtroom was forgotten. She paused for a minute in the doorway where she stood with her father's lawyer, and a look of utter horror was in her eyes, a look so unmistakable that everyone read it correctly and pityingly. After that one became conscious of her face and of her beauty. Syivia was the one name that could have suited her perfectly. She wore a dark-blue linen dress made by a "home dressmaker" who knew nothing of style and Sylvia Holden gave it all the style it had. It belonged to her with its artless, square-cut neck, its elbow sleeves and straight lines. Her hat was broad and black and shaded a face beautifully oval and stained with summer tan. That was all there was to say about her when one tried, as all the reporters did, to analyze her appearance. But there was so much more that it left everyone, even Mrs. Hetherington, concentrated on her. She looked so good, so unspoiled, so innocently charming that the mere thought of her connection with a case like this made everyone aghast at the contrast. It was as if some one had begun to recite a lyric in the middle of an obscene song and drowned out the song with sheer beauty of music.

"I didn't know that they still made girls like that," said Mrs. Farwell to Alpha, and Alpha answered bitterly:

"She's the product of abnormality, remember. The regular type isn't like that."

Ethel Wallace regarded the Holden girl furtively yet defiantly, but Sylvia Holden returned none of the curious, prying glances that came her way. She sat like an embodiment of all the trite lovely things that can be said about girlhood and she had exactly the effect on the courtroom that the lawyers had intended. She demanded protection, cried out for it unconsciously, as Ethel Wallace didn't. Ethel Wallace, one would think, could look out for herself. This other girl needed shielding. And everyone thought that it was rotten of Holden to let his daughter be dragged into the case.

She took the stand a little before noon. It was hideous for her. One could see that, though the dark tan skin of her face neither flushed nor perspired. Nor did she fidget. She trembled, which was worse. Her voice shook ever so little, but the fine spirit in her demanded composure and got it. Watching her, Mrs. Farwell was reminded of things she had long forgotten in the press of hundreds of social functions, of the coming of Henry Holden's bride to the city. He had met her in the East and brought her here a bride, and everyone had said that she was charming. But she had mingled little and then, some years ago, died inconspicuously, as if snuffed out. At the time of her death she was almost a recluse—companioned, Mrs. Farwell guessed now, by this girl whose bringing-up was an act of defiance against the flagrancy of the father: possibly the mother's single defiance. The girl was not only delicate and well-bred, but she had a fine, straightforward spirit. The impress of it was unmistakable. The whole courtroom was grave in her honor. There was not a hint of salaciousness in the atmosphere. Incredibly, she had by her very presence washed the place clean.

She told her story and it was simple. The afternoon of

Memorial Day her father had been with her. He had spent the morning at his office and had come home to their apartment for lunch and in the afternoon they had gone to see Nancy Fay in a motion picture. She told it simply and easily. At about that stage in the proceedings the court adjourned for lunch.

The women jurors were not hungry. They were tired of each uninspired item which the family hotel had to offer them.

"But why didn't they bring the girl on before, I wonder?" asked Mrs. Brown. "Why waste the taxpayers' money in prolonging a case when the alibi makes it so simple?"

Nell Farwell snapped her up. Mrs. Brown was always talking about the taxpayers' money as if she paid it all.

"Doubtless they were trying to leave the girl out of it if possible. Even her father looked ashamed of bringing her in."

"It's the first time anything has shaken him," said Alpha hardly. "Anyway, as far as I'm concerned the thing's over. I don't see any use in going on. Even if the girl is lying, I think she should be upheld in her lie. What can one do for the Wallace girl anyhow? She's spoilt in grain."

When they went back to the courtroom it was to hear the cross-examination of Sylvia Holden. The prosecuting attorney went at it as gently as he could. Sylvia Holden was not the kind of person one could browbeat to gain favor with the jury. She was too unpretending and helpless, and too clearly not trading on her beauty or helplessness. Her trading was done in spite of her. The attorney asked her where she had seen this motion picture and she told him—at the Majestic Theater.

"You said the Lyric Theater, I believe, before."

Holden's attorney tried to break in, but the court overruled. The prosecuting attorney was very mild.

"Think a minute, Miss Holden. We only want to be sure of our facts. Which theater was it, Lyric or Majestic?"

Sylvia Holden looked at him straight.

"I remember now, it was the Majestic. I am quite sure."

He let her go. She left the witness stand and went back to the chair she occupied beside her father's lawyer. But her eyes went past the lawyer to her father with an odd mature look, and suddenly she seemed not to need protection but to be protecting.

The State called one more witness. It was the manager of the Majestic Theater, who said that the Majestic Theater had been closed all day Memorial Day because of an unfortunate break in the electric conduit. His evidence was corroborated, definite, and it made Sylvia Holden a liar.

While they exposed her mistake she sat almost rigidly, her eyes on the face of the man who was making her out a liar. The attorney for her father leaned over and spoke to her, kindly, reassuringly, and her eyes dropped instantly to her lap. Thereafter she did not move at all.

The lawyer for the defense took up the cudgels in summing up his case. It was clear enough, he said, that Miss Holden had been with her father all of Memorial Day afternoon. Whether at the Majestic, Lyric, Olympic, Doric (for comedy's sake he reeled off a string of names of theaters, some of them imaginary). Personally he never could remember which one he had been in the night before. Miss Holden had been with her father. He dropped it there. This unfortunate young woman had doubtless imagined most of her experience and, being led by a modern and deplorable desire for sensationalism, had decided to exploit some one. Possibly there were instances in which blackmail had been

obtained, which had occurred to her. Vice must be stamped out, but attacks on citizens of such a sort must be curbed. The important citizen is a prey to such attacks. So on and on he went persuasively, showing us the way out of the hole, thought Nell Farwell, who resolved then and there to have this lawyer for dinner next month.

Without more ado the prosecuting attorney made his concluding remarks to the jury. He said that Holden could not have been at the Majestic Theater, yet Miss Holden had insisted that it was the Majestic. He let it go at that. No threats of perjury. The fact remained. Society must be protected. The unfortunate young woman—who had been so sinned against—but after all, the rest of what he said was idle talk. There seemed little doubt that Sylvia Holden had been trying to protect her father—and that as far as evidence went she had failed.

Then suddenly it was over. The judge was wiping his spectacles with evident relief that his work was done and telling the jury that they must be guided by the evidence and not by sympathy, no matter how or in whose behalf those sympathies might direct themselves; that they must decide whether the evidence beyond a reasonable doubt warranted a verdict for the State. A reasonable doubt of guilt in their minds would entail a verdict for the defendant. He charged them accustomedly as if he ran through the same speech often but still enjoyed his elucidation of these points. Before the jury was marshaled out, Mrs. Farwell looked again at Sylvia Holden. She did not meet her eyes, for the girl's glance was directed now straight at Ethel Wallace, and the eyes held horror intensified, horror and fear. But Ethel Wallace was powdering her face with that little pink pad and giving half an ear to the stern remarks of the woman beside her. The shoulders of Henry Holden, beside his lawyer, drooped.

His fine air of a man of the world had gone out of him. He looked his fifty years, and he did not look at his daughter.

The foreman of the jury was Mrs. Hetherington's fat butcher, and he was determined to pay especial attention to her opinion and to defer to it. He felt apparently that in her he had found the quintessence of womanhood. In the jury room they seated themselves for deliberation and for some reason Mrs. Farwell found herself seeking the side of Mrs. Brown. She did not want to sit by Alpha, who was wedged in between a lanky clerkly person and a well-known dealer in real estate.

The butcher had been on juries before. He knew how to go about things. He suggested that they review the evidence informally, and yet it was hard to begin. Locked in a room together, these twelve persons of no previous association suddenly became conscious that it was a difficult business to plunge into discussion of this case which was so embarrassing in incident. All these years, thought Mrs. Farwell, men have been deciding these cases among themselves with freedom of discussion. What are women bringing to it? And she, who had never been especially suffragist and was somewhat intolerant of what she had termed "quarrelsome women talking about their rights," thought of herself as a member of her sex in a strange, responsible, impersonal manner.

It was of course the butcher and Mrs. Hetherington who began the talk—pomposity on his side, tripping delicacy and wordiness on hers. Odd how she flowered in the presence of this admiration! She was more of a personality than she had been when she herded with women. The butcher represented her idea of what man was to woman as clearly as she represented his idea of woman. On that idea, backed by what evidence had been presented but influenced by that

idea, they would pass judgment. Nell Farwell longed for a dozen cool, clean, impersonal minds around that table. Instead, as she looked around, it seemed to her she saw a hundred minor feelings. Embarrassment, boredom, the look of men waiting for a lead, Alpha Long smoldering in a kind of black and illogical hatred at everything. She herself leaned forward, the domination of the social leader in her tone.

"There's only one thing that matters. Was Mr. Holden with his daughter or not on Memorial Day afternoon? Otherwise the Wallace girl's story seems irrefutable."

A man shuffled his feet.

Some one said—Mrs. Farwell found out in the next three hours that he was a teacher in a business college—"Of course there is also the question of whether the girl's previous moral character was good."

"Personally, I fail to see," answered Mrs. Farwell sharply, "what that has to do with the case."

Silence hung for a minute. The difference between the men and the women had been defined somehow in that brief statement. Naturally, as all the men knew, it had everything to do with it. Then Alpha Long said crudely:

"You mean, I conclude, that if the girl was not what is known as a good girl, she has no right to the law's protection—"

"Not at all," said the butcher, "not at all—"

The fat was in the fire. The discussion moved. On and on it went. The teacher from the business college and the real-estate man fell into a prolonged wrangling over a question of whether some minor point had or had not been incontestably proven. They had retired to the jury room at four o'clock. At six some one appeared at the door and had a brief colloquy with the butcher. The butcher's infor-

mation was apparently such that food was sent in, a strange dinner of hot roast-beef sandwiches and coffee and ice cream sitting in soggy pyramids on top of wedges of pie. The men jurors ate heavily and criticized the food. Two or three were beginning to look extremely bored and one of them, a sandy man who sat by a window and smoked, called for a vote. The foreman looked doubtful but he called for the vote. They knew by this time where the sentiment of the jury was and the preliminary vote confirmed it. Mrs. Brown was for conviction, for conviction with set lips and consciousness of civic virtue. Mrs. Farwell was for conviction. The other two women were for acquittal, as were all the men. Ethel Wallace had made a most unpleasant impression and the sweet look of Sylvia Holden lingered.

Electric lights had been turned on in the room. Nell Farwell was no longer conscious either of delay or weariness. With every hour's passing, clarity had seemed to come to her.

"Perhaps these ladies would like to talk the matter over together," said the foreman, "and see if they cannot come to an agreement?"

It was clear that he had great faith in Mrs. Hetherington and she, evidently inspired by his faith, took up the conversation when the men and women grouped themselves in separate knots at the end of the jury room.

"The way it is with me," she said, "I feel that poor girl was telling the truth. She was confused—that was all. She was such a lovely girl and I'm sure that if there is anything in bringing-up, she must have a good father. That Ethel Wallace made a very poor impression on me, indeed." She glanced into the mirror of her little handbag and something in the gesture was familiar to Mrs. Farwell. It came to her. There, but for some chance, but for the handle of the "Mrs."

title, sat Ethel Wallace grown up. Such a one was Mrs. Hetherington, wavering eternally in the sight of men's eyes and the reflection from her pocket mirror.

"But the evidence," said Mrs. Brown, "one must decide these things on evidence. We're all sorry for Miss Holden, of course. But if she committed perjury, which seems probable, are we the ones to take upon ourselves responsibility for not judging by the evidence alone? And the Wallace girl must be protected by society."

It was wordy, thought Nell Farwell, and not the way she felt at all. She was depressed by this business of judging. It had seemed such a simple thing to do—to decide on the merits of the case. Now the starch was out of her mind and soul. Judgment was not a matter of weighing on an accurate scale—it could not be—it was a matter of trying to average what all these personalities thought, and what they thought was founded on their experiences. Alpha, for example, had no moral sense. She didn't believe in conventional morality. She saw that the Holden girl was the best of the lot and for her she was trying to cast her vote.

"I'm sure that Mrs. Farwell agrees with me," said Mrs. Brown. "Won't you tell them what you think, Mrs. Farwell? Women have a great duty to perform. I don't suppose you know what an enormous proportion of these cases are always decided in favor of the man. Now that women have been called to serve on juries, it seems to me that it is our barest duty to take up the cause of purification. Mrs. Farwell feels with me, I am sure."

Mrs. Farwell lifted her eyes—experienced, worldly-wise—but tired, simple.

"I am thinking of our duty to Sylvia Holden more than to anyone else. You think she lied about being with her father, Mrs. Brown. Well, perhaps she did. It looks so to me.

I think she did so, because, stronger than her instinct for fineness and truth which is apparent to us all, was her instinct —bred in her artificially—to protect her father. The mother must have been like that. All these years she had protected her husband and it came easily to the daughter. It was the thing she put first—to save him from Ethel Wallace. I don't care about seeing Mr. Holden convicted. I'm not sure the Wallace girl told the truth, not sure of what were her attempts at provocativeness or what relation they should have to his resistance; not sure that we can determine enough about their joint psychology to decide how far to condone possible lack of resistance—" she looked around at the stiffening faces of the men and smiled in faint derision. "But I do think that if that poor child Sylvia Holden starts out protecting men now, she will be doing it all her life—for her father or some other man. The iron had better be put in her soul now while she's young, while tissues heal easily, so that she will see that there is a justice—crude, like this—cruel enough, but something that will not let evil escape because it happens to exist in your own family or social group."

So deeply spoke Mrs. Farwell, with utter lack of embarrassment—she who at many a dinner table had refused to ever let the conversation get "heavy." Unconsciously her voice had risen or dead silence had fallen, for as she stopped an echo rang faintly. She hesitated in thought for only a second and concluded:

"The way to protect Sylvia Holden, who is the single lovely thing in this whole unlovely case, is to make her understand that, gracious and gallant as she was, she couldn't save him, that it was a useless lie."

The men broke away at that. Some one suggested that they had better stick to the facts and quit the theorizing—

that this was a court of law and not a story-book. But a tired and inconspicuous man who had said he was a clerk in a bookstore and had an air of trying to conceal frayed cuffs, broke into the discussion.

"I do not think she lied," he said, "at least, I am not sure. I have been casting about in my mind and now that the thing has come to a deadlock it may interest you to know that the actress Nancy Fay was here on Memorial Day and that the picture she was in was 'Daughters of Nobility' and it was at the Lyric. I saw it myself. Miss Holden said she saw Nancy Fay. I've been trying to recall what picture I saw and it came to me that it was the one I mention."

"She said she was at the Majestic."

"She could easily have been confused."

"Maybe you are confused now," said Mrs. Brown sharply.

"No, I am not. I always go to the Lyric because it's cheaper. I only go on afternoons of holidays and yet I remember that I saw that picture in the afternoon and told my mother about it in the evening. I never go on Sundays because I have to get the stock ready for Monday's trade. Memorial Day was the only holiday this summer except the Fourth of July. On the Fourth we went to the country. I have checked it up carefully in my own mind."

"Why didn't her attorney bring that out? He must have corroborated the events beforehand," said the business-college teacher.

The gentle Mr. Stebbins seemed to address himself exclusively to Mrs. Farwell, though they all listened.

"I think the lawyer did not wish to confuse the girl further. Besides, he couldn't really prove her father was with her. We have to judge of her veracity about that. But on this point there seems to be some reason to believe in her truthfulness, or attempt at it. After all, what the attor-

neys have asked us to do is to judge which girl needs support most?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Jordan the butcher, "certainly not, sir. I protest. We are to judge on the evidence. And on the evidence, further corroborated by this rather delayed statement of your own, Mr. Holden is clearly not guilty."

Mr. Stebbins stepped back with an air of never contradicting a customer. But his eyes, superior to his manner, stayed on Nell Farwell.

"What you say is all true, Mrs. Farwell. You are quite right. Women are fools to protect and keep on protecting, destroying moral fiber in themselves and men too. But don't drive the iron too deep into that girl's soul. There is such a thing as a branding-iron which you might use by mistake. I know."

Jordan the butcher felt the thing getting out of hand. He glanced at the men and back at Nell Farwell as if to say, "This comes of women on juries—with theories, refusing to sum up the evidence—everyone knows how these cases should end."

"Well," he asked aloud, "does this evidence of—er—Mr. Stebbins—change your minds, ladies? It corroborates Miss Holden in every detail except in the minor misstatement. Does it clear up your mind, Mrs. Farwell?"

"My mind was quite clear before, Mr. Jordan," said Mrs. Farwell, "but Mr. Stebbins does alter my point of view. He has created a reasonable doubt on some points—a reasonable doubt as to what my vote should be, I think. I respect his judgment and I will vote for acquittal."

Mrs. Brown was nettled. She disliked being left alone and she had not followed this intricate understanding of the bookseller and the lady. She picked up a phrase.

"Why Mr. Stebbins did not tell us this before I cannot

guess. It changes the face of things. Of course, as the judge so wisely said, if any reasonable doubt exists we should not bring in a verdict of guilty. We are bound by our consciences to clear the defendant if there is that doubt. Now Mrs. Farwell says—"

While Mrs. Brown wound up her compromise in a stiff little speech, Mrs. Farwell moved toward Mr. Stebbins. But at her approach his eyes fell and he was again a shy little man with stringy cuffs, a bookstore clerk who had perhaps drawn wisdom from shelves laden with experience of life.

The butcher, already swelling with importance to make his report to the judge, again took the ballot. The acquittal was unanimous. Mr. Jordan glanced benignly at Mrs. Hetherington to see if she had noted how things came out his way, the way of the masterful man. But his eyes fell first on Alpha Long, black and glowering, and then on Nell Farwell, again wrapped in her cloak of power and social position. His eyes dropped. There was something funny about this case—an uncomfortable difference from most cases he had known.

The spectators had long since gone. Sylvia Holden sat alone in the back of the courtroom. She did not go to her father when he got his verdict. The lawyer stood talking in low, satisfied tones to Holden. But Sylvia's eyes went to Ethel Wallace, grown restive under the bleak, discouraged gaze of the policewoman. The Wallace girl began to talk noisily and angrily. Sylvia slipped out the back door of the courtroom.

Mrs. Farwell followed as soon as she could. She found the girl as she had hoped, still in the building, sitting huddled on a marble bench in a half-lit corridor, waiting for something or somebody.

"I'm glad it's over, Sylvia," said the older woman, sitting down.

Sylvia nodded.

"And I'm sorry you had to go through it. Men don't realize—"

"Men," said Sylvia, in low, tearless bitterness, "are beasts. All beasts. I hate them all with their fat, sleek, curious faces, their disgusting eyes! And women are bad—worse. That awful girl who didn't care what they said, who sat and flirted—that woman who giggled on the jury—I hate everyone!"

She was close to hysteria. The hours of waiting had done that. But Mrs. Farwell saw that Stebbins had been right. While the jury had struggled for a verdict, Sylvia Holden had brought hers in against the world. She found it guilty, black with guilt. Mrs. Farwell knew what she must do. She said to herself grimly that there was at least a reasonable doubt that the girl was wrong about men and women. It would be her job to defend the world before Sylvia Holden and win her case.

"Come, child," she said, "let me take you home."

"I never—never will talk about—that—again," answered Sylvia, "and I don't want to go home. How can I go there?"

"I don't want you to. Come home with me. To-morrow we'll see. Talk to your father and plan. I'm going to Europe next month. It's a long way off, Sylvia. I think you're coming with me, away from this and everything. Come, dear. There are things I want to prove to you."

THE GIRL IN THE TREE

By

Alice Brown

THE thing that couldn't happen is the thing that does. Will anybody believe it? Let us see.

The Blakesleys—not all Blakesley in name, but Blakesley by birth—had gathered at the family mansion that has stood for over two hundred years in unchanged dignity in one of our academy towns. They had assembled for the funeral services of its last owner, Mrs. Amory Blakesley—known among them as Cousin Sabrina—and now, four days later, they were staying on, as if the knowledge of the will she had left had paralyzed their nerve centers and they actually couldn't go. Old Maggie, the "help"—not much over fifty, but old in the sense of faithfulness—and Martin, the man of all work, similarly brevetted, were furious in a dumb, lowering way. To them it seemed as if the Blakesleys, who had never been warmly welcome here in Madam Blakesley's lifetime, had camped down for good, and that it would take an earthquake or some such expedient of God's providence to blast them out. It required all the tact and resolute argument of Mary Gorham, Madam Blakesley's companion, to keep them in order. Mary had herself been here only a couple of years, but she had become, on her first quiet entrance, the angel in the house, and she was still its moving pulse. Now she also was staying on because the cousins took it for granted and even commanded it, and she, who

had a direct sense of values but no suspicion of ulterior motives, innocently wondered why.

Perhaps the cousins, who were not given to mental analysis, wondered in an equal degree why they felt obliged to keep a detaining finger on her, though, to a man and woman, they knew they must. But in some corner of each mind, unconfessed—since a Blakesley had to guard his self-respect—was the conviction that since Madam Blakesley, after trifling legacies to all the cousins and generous ones to Martin and Maggie, had made young John Blakesley, an unconsidered cousin out of the West, her residuary legatee, Mary, in the house at the date when the will was made, might have some idea how it came about. Cousin Sabrina must have been bamboozled in some fashion by this John, and they could only manipulate Mary to find out how the bamboozling was done. John had been living in California with his invalid mother—who had recently died—and it was not long before that he had come on to see Cousin Sabrina with the perfectly transparent purpose of doing the bamboozling. And he was coming again now. Mary said she had written him when Madam Blakesley became suddenly worse. Had she written him at Madam Blakesley's request? a cousin inquired sharply. Oh, yes, Mary said, quite unmoved by the tone. After that one time of seeing him, Madam Blakesley had really fretted to see him again.

And now they were waiting supper for him, all the cousins, sitting round the library in a semicircular formation that was in itself threatening. There was Cousin Jos, the head of the clan, long past seventy now, the dry skin of his emaciated face stretched like parchment over a bony framework noticeably Greek, and his raiment so exquisite of tone and cut that one might have believed him to be given over to the worship of his fading body. Everything about him was

aggressively fastidious. He even walked delicately, but that, Cousin Harriet said ruthlessly, was because his frontal arches had given way. So he got no credit there. Cousin Harriet, who was Mrs. Frye, a robust, protruding woman, inevitably suggested to eyes acquainted with bygone fashions a conformity to tight shiny basques over her abundant bosom, the waving of fringes and glitter of jet. But she conformed bravely to modern styles, though under her floating chiffon you still felt the presence of a corseted bulwark, like immovable masonry blurred by a cloud.

There was Bridgie, her son, a weedy young man who had led a break-neck career from landscape painting to flame-colored verse and a freak magazine where he could say his say which other editors brutally denied him; and there was Milicent, frankly an old maid, caring neither for clothes in their changing tyranny, nor, it seemed, for anything short of the Ideal. She had had many philanthropic enthusiasms, which she took like infectious diseases. Now she was on the side of World Peace, to be attained by persuading the lamb, in all circumstances, to lie down with four legs in the air when he saw the lion hurtling toward him and just see what the lion would say to that. None of the Blakesleys agreed with her here, being all frankly belligerent in their public as well as their private predilections, and Milicent, after sessions of fulminating argument with one after another, ceased speaking to them.

Probably there never was a lover of peace in its dovelike form as it floats in the empyrean more frankly hostile to individual divergence of opinion than Milicent. And now she sat in this encampment of Blakesleys, a spare, delicate figure, her eyes burning under heavy brows, her handsome mouth slightly curled at the corners, her equally handsome nose contemptuous, but her fine hands folded in such per-

sistent quiet that you suspected them. You wondered what they were really prepared to do, those hands, to the misguided fools who tried to manipulate the world in a fashion different from their own. The cruder members of the clan were wont to declare, when her name came up in conclave, that Milicent had never forgotten the old days when she and Jos had been so madly in love with each other and the family had stepped in and quashed the idea of marriage. That, they said, and not differing ideals, had sealed her lips to all Blakesleys. They understood perfectly that her willingness to consult with them on the topic of Cousin Sabrina's will was to be accepted as merely an armed truce. The emergency over, she would cease speaking to them again.

The cousins had not delayed supper from any welcoming impulse toward John, but because they had tacitly determined to be with him from the first. He must not be allowed a period of delay to prepare his own case, or, more vital still, to consult with them on the topic of Cousin Sabrina's will really a dominant figure in their minds. Mrs. Freye spoke.

"Suppose we have Miss Gorham in? We haven't actually questioned her yet."

"Yes," returned Cousin Jos, in the distinguished voice he had formed long ago in traveling abroad, chiefly with reference to the vowel "a." "By all means have her in."

Mrs. Frye rose and looked helplessly about the wall, as if there ought to be a bell, though she knew there wasn't. On this Bridgie, throwing off his languor, came to his feet.

"I'll get her," said he. "She's a peach. Mary's a peach."

He left the room with his long stride, and an obscure cousin in the corner inquired in a shocked tone:

"Cousin Harriet, do you think he calls her by her first name?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Frye, in the wearied perplexity she could

easily be made to feel about Bridgie, who cheerfully met nobody's expectations, "he calls everybody by their first names."

"A peach!" commented Cousin Milicent, to herself, in a voice that suggested clingstones, very hard and green. "A peach!"

But Bridgie was back again following Mary, for whom he held the door with a suggestion of ceremony mildly irritating to the cousins, who knew her now for an important element in the house, as in the immediate past, and dangerous. She paused and looked at them inquiringly and Bridgie ostentatiously drew forward a chair. Mary Gorham was a slender girl with an odd clarity of loveliness which lay chiefly in her dark-lashed gray eyes. They were eyes that, unchallenged, looked merely wistful as if they found life a puzzling business and wondered if a person named Mary Gorham could do anything about it. Involuntarily you in turn wondered how she would look if she waked up, if the color flowed delightedly into those pale cheeks and the eyes began to smile. Cousin Jos, by reason of his seniority, was the first to speak. He did so to an accompaniment of ah's and long-drawn, languid intonations which served him in good stead for linking hesitant thoughts.

"Miss Gorham," said he, not unkindly, he hoped, however much of a schemer she might be, "you were here when Mr. John Blakesley made his visit to Madam Blakesley?"

"Oh, yes," said Mary promptly. "I have been here all the time for two years and it was six months ago he came."

"How long did he stay?" inquired Mrs. Frye.

"Only three days. His mother was ill in California and he had to get back to her."

"Now what," said Cousin Jos judicially, putting the tips

of his fingers together, "should you say was his purpose in coming?"

Mary's eyes widened in a brief surprise. She thought they knew.

"Why," said she, "Madam Blakesley sent for him."

Immediately all of them with an amazing unanimity, seeming to have rehearsed it beforehand, looked as if they might believe a good many things, but you couldn't expect them to believe that.

"Sent for him?" repeated a skeptical voice from the row of cousins in the background. "I don't believe she even knew he existed. None of us did. He's only a second cousin once removed."

"Oh, yes," said Bridgie, in languid rebuttal. "I knew about him. He writes things—of sorts."

"It was the book," said Mary, turning on him a clear-eyed glance, "that made her send. She saw it advertised and it recalled him to her—that there was a Cousin John, I mean—and she got it, chiefly on account of the name. I read it to her. And then she sent for him to come on."

"Extraordinary!" murmured Cousin Jos, now putting up his eyeglass to look at her censoriously. "What's the book about?"

Mary's face in the most amazingly lovely way dimpled up into laughter.

"I couldn't tell you," she said. "I've read it over and over, but if you ask me what it's about—why, you'd have to read it."

"What's it called?" came the captious voice from the rear line. "At least you know that."

Mary had ceased laughing; she gave the title quite clearly and softly and as if she loved it.

"The Girl in the Tree," she said.

Now there seemed to be a chorus of voices repeating it with a curiously hostile unanimity, in one key, though all the notes jarred: *"The Girl in the Tree!"*

"Oh, I know that," said Bridgie, with his air of being on the spot. "Haven't read it myself, but one of the fellows is going to review it for me."

"Humorous?" inquired Cousin Jos. "George Ade, that sort of thing?"

"Feminism?" suggested Cousin Milicent, in her incisive way.

"Oh, dear, no!" said Bridgie. "It's fanciful, you know, fantastic, if you see what I mean. And not so very original, if you ask me. Derivative, I should call it. You could see what the fellow'd been reading—Walter De la Mare, Forster, Dunsany."

Then Mary astonished them. She colored high, indubitably with anger.

"It isn't either," she said. "Derivative! Derivative yourself! It's one of the most original things ever written, and that's what Madam Blakesley saw in it. And it was so convincing, so—so—oh, I don't know how to say it—but she felt if she could see him he might be able to tell her more, tell her what to do."

"Do?" said Cousin Jos. "What'd she want to do?"

Mary looked all round the semicircle. She even seemed to seek out the rank and file in the rear and interrogate them with the others: whether indeed it would be possible to enter on this grotesque adventure of teaching a pack of Blakesleys, all running, as the pack does, true to form, how to believe there was a world outside the world they were accustomed to touch and see. She began speaking reflectively, as if resolved to consider their capacities and make no mistake.

"Madam Blakesley," she said, "as you know, had had for many years a restricted life—physically. She had lain in bed seven years, and all her patience, all her determination to forget herself in books and news of the outside world couldn't keep her from thinking of herself as a prisoner. And that book—"

Here she paused, and Cousin Jos, seeing it all perfectly now, was relieved to find he could help her out.

"Oh! ah!" he said. "Some sort of cure in it, what? Osteopathy? Chiropractic? Made her think something could be done."

Hope faded from Mary's face. She had thought something could be done with the receptive intelligence of the Blakesleys, but she relinquished that, with a sigh.

"Now what sort of person," said Cousin Harriet, as if she felt all this had been a divagation from the real thoroughfare, and to be escaped from as soon as possible, "what sort of person is this young man?"

Again Mary hesitated. Then she said, in her clear low voice:

"A quite special sort of person."

"Now, now," said Cousin Jos, irritated as he always was at any unexpected combination of words, "what do you mean by that?"

"Well," said Mary, as if she found it impossible to meet a Blakesley on that point, "he's coming, you know. You'll see."

But Mrs. Frye felt these side excursions into the psychology of John Blakesley to be merely futile. Here were they all intrenched in an impregnable position: Cousin Sabrina who, it became every minute more apparent, from Mary's testimony, had been of unsound mind, had left the major part of her property to this Western relative who had,

in some fashion to be found out, actually hypnotized her into doing it. He was clever enough to do that. He'd be clever enough to understand the combined power of all the New England Blakesleys when they set out to contest the will, and he'd be glad and thankful, on a New England promise of an actually generous sum, to settle out of court. But Mary evidently felt she could do a little more toward rendering the New England temperament slightly more malleable for John when he should come.

"You see," she hesitated, "Madam Blakesley had been growing more and more distressed as time went on, and his coming seemed to be the one thing that took her out of herself."

"Distressed?" repeated Cousin Jos, with finality. "Unsound mind! I see."

"Not unsound in the least," said Mary hotly. "Distressed, as we should all be if we'd been in bed seven years and knew there wasn't a chance of our standing on our two feet again—tired, sick of the whole business. And when she read his book, why, it was as if somebody opened a door, and when he came he opened the door farther—gave it a kick, pushed it wide."

Her eyes were shining so that Bridgie stared into them in a manner Mrs. Frye found so undesirable that she ejaculated his name in a rebuking undertone. But,—cutting in upon the warning,—"Bridgie!" Mary called in what sounded like a cry of triumph, "He's come!" And she flew into the hall to meet him.

She was not the first. Maggie was there, opening the door to him, Maggie who had gone about her duties for the last week like a dour walking image. Martin was there, and they seemed, in a welter of smiles and delighted grunts, to be dragging John Blakesley in between them. He was

laughing at them and with them, but without shaking them off he managed a quick handclasp for Mary, and the utterance of her name.

"Mary!" he said, and the Blakesleys, crowded in the library doorway, heard and wondered, in mental unison, what "Mary" spoken in that way could mean. He was a tall, broad-shouldered fellow with one of the most distinctive faces that ever attracted the casual eye. The features were large and cut to a pattern only attained through ancestral pride, but there was something soft about it as well as something aloof and serious. The softness was by no means weak. If he sometimes glanced past you as if he hesitated to meet your gaze, it was for your sake, not his own. He must have got used to knowing he had the gift of surprising secrecies latent in eyes and playing about lips, and, really not wanting them, knew also that people ought to be protected from giving more than they wished. But he was equal to all ordinary situations. He might have a shifting foothold in the clouds, but he didn't live there, and he got himself shaken hands with by most of the Blakesleys, with entire adequacy, said he'd like only to give himself a brush-up, and joined them as they flocked out to the table.

All the leaves were in the mahogany, and Maggie looked placidity itself for the first time since Martin had been requested to put in the leaves. The Blakesleys are what are known as great eaters. They are persons of stomachic remorses and hot water, bicarbonate persons, and they have an unquenchable passion at night for the entrées that are *revenants* of the noon dinner, so to speak. It takes a good deal of sheer physical strength to eat as much as the Blakesleys. This John may have known from family hearsay, perhaps only from the evidence of their overnourished phy-

siques. He leaned forward and addressed Mrs. Frye, who occupied the place of responsibility opposite Jos.

"Cousin Harriet," he said, with his charming smile and a voice also so charming that you had to break your own current of thought to listen to it, "might I—" but instead of finishing, he turned to Maggie who, with an expression of beatitude entirely foreign to her these days, had been handing about a soup of deadly complexity and richness. "Maggie," he said, "I wonder if I might—could you give me a couple of eggs on toast?"

And Maggie who, as they all knew revered the tradition of silent service, answered richly:

"Sure I will, my dear." And moreover she left the room hotfoot and did not return until she brought the eggs with her.

They got through supper as the serious business it was, and without a mention of wills or undue influence. Then they returned to the library with an air, Mary hysterically translated to herself, of lining up. Again they disposed themselves in close formation and Bridgie, though after Cousin Jos had asked fretfully, "Why will you, my boy?" was the only one to smoke. He stretched his long legs out in a way that annoyed Cousin Milicent exceedingly, because they pointed directly at her, and regarded John with a cool, inquiring, and not patently hostile interrogation. As for John himself, he sat upright in a Chippendale chair which had, as if by volition of its own, got into the center of the arena, his hands upon his knees. Once or twice he turned to Mary, and she answered the look with a similar bright signal of her own, but the glances seemed to concur in saying, "Really, you know, we mustn't look at each other or we shall laugh." John did laugh, suddenly, not with the robust volley his friends were used to, but a queer

little chuckle that seemed to imply he had a joke all to himself.

"Now," said he, "behold me, here by my lonesome in the middle of the room. Something like the prisoner at the bar."

Cousin Jos, having no ear for pleasantry, accepted that as an opening.

"Yes, my dear fellow, yes," said he. "That's precisely how it is. In a sense, you are. Or a witness, rather. Yes, a witness. The fact is, we are all extremely glad to see you here to-day. In fact, we should have sent for you if you hadn't come. No doubt you know the terms of Cousin Sabrina's will."

"Yes," said John, with a quick glance full at him. "She told me all about it."

"Aha!" said Cousin Jos, an aspiration that meant "We're getting somewhere now, and sooner than I thought."

Mrs. Frye drew a long breath, and her excellent corset, valiant under the chiffon, did creak. There were other inarticulate comments from outlying Blakesleys, and Mary, silent, sat mentally tabulating them.

"We understand," said Cousin Jos, accepting now to the full his leadership of the clan, "we understand that you came on here some months ago. You had frequent conversations with Cousin Sabrina. Did she in those conversations refer to her intentions as to her will?"

"Oh, yes," said John promptly, "she told me exactly what she meant to do."

"Did you," pursued Cousin Jos, "ah—advise her?"

John's answering look betrayed no offense. He was a knowing person, and he had learned in this first brief skirmish that you couldn't allow yourself to take offense

at a Blakesley. They were like men undertaking blindfold the difficult business of life. They weren't fair game.

"Advise her to leave it to me?" he inquired. "Lord, no!"

"What is your impression," asked Milicent, in her chilliest voice—the one she kept for rebuttal of attacks on the Ideal —"of Cousin Sabrina's reason for selecting you—perfectly unknown to her until recently—for her heir?"

John looked at her thoughtfully. Was it probable, his glance seemed to ask, that he could tell her?

"It does seem queer," he conceded, "but really it isn't. You see—" he spoke directly to Milicent now, and her dark eyes met his as if they challenged him to convince a lady as near to authoritative sources of conduct as she. "You see," he went on impetuously, "Cousin Sabrina—she asked me to call her that, only really she wanted me to leave off the cousin—got an idea I had a secret."

Cousin Jos seemed to prick up his ears. What the devil did it all mean?

"You see," John said again, as a sort of springboard to help him dive to the rescue of these submerged Blakesleys, "Sabrina was very unhappy."

There was a murmur from the circle, of incredulity, of faint amusement, of denial. He read it so.

"Oh, yes, she was," he insisted. "Think of her, bedridden, tied by the leg!" A maidenly Blakesley in the rear rank made a noise in her throat implying that legs might be expected in this age of lipsticks and cigarettes, but they no more belonged to a Blakesley by marriage than to the Queen of Spain. "And beyond that," he continued, searching his mind for what he had gathered about Cousin Sabrina, "she'd always been tied by the leg. A prisoner, that's what she was. Always had been. First, her mother died when she

was quite little and left her to take care of her father. No cinch, I tell you. I know, for mother told me. Then, when her father died she married Cousin Amory. And he was a pill."

A combined roar, of small volume, went up from the cousins, exactly as the animals in the Zoo catch an infection of revolt.

"Oh, yes," said John quietly, "he was. Mother told me. Kind of a country deacon, in spite of his money, the sort that doctors the barrel of apples and makes his wife's poor little trousseau last on into her widowhood."

"Well? well?" said Cousin Jos authoritatively. "What's all that got to do with Sabrina's will?"

"I know, I know," said John, drawing his brows together and thinking, as he realized how foolish it was going to sound. "Sabrina was almost crazy, overwrought on the subject of escape."

"Aha!" said Cousin Jos. "Now we're getting somewhere. Unsound mind!"

"Not on your life," said John, looking at him as if, on a repetition of the word, he might deface that parchment countenance. "Sabrina was as sound as a pippin. But she wanted to get away, didn't much care where or how. And she'd got the idea that I should understand. Mary did, and she was no end grateful. And when she heard about me, she thought, 'Why, there's two of them.' "

"I suppose," said Bridgie, eying his cigarette reflectively, as if the secret lay in that, "it was the damn book."

"Yes," said John, in relief, because it looked for a minute as if somebody was offering him a rescuing hand, "as you say, it was the damn book."

He knew, being familiar with books, why Bridgie tagged it with the overworked adjective. There were so many books

published from glowing intent, only to die untimely, and here was one that perplexingly was bringing in the writer a fat emolument he had been at small pains to earn. Bridgie's "damn" was hurled disgustedly not so much at the book itself as at Fortune, who is dangerously enamored of her own mad jokes.

"Can't take it in," said Cousin Jos helplessly. "A book!"

A person might be influenced by a book to go as a missionary, he would have implied, to make explorations, to become a theosophist. But escape—what had escape from a comfortable house and a fat income got to do with a book? And especially to the extent of making a will?

"Perhaps, John," said Mary, "you'd better give them some idea of the book."

John frowned, but with perplexity, not in reproof of her.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "Difficult! Makes you feel like a fool, explaining your own stuff. The book itself is no great shakes. However, I'll try. The War," he began slowly, "has brought about new conditions. You know that. Psychology, the general state of mind, has quite changed."

Cousin Milicent seemed to wake here to a surprised interest in him. Her hands trembled upon each other.

"I have never," she said, "known such wholesale interest in the great questions: Organized Religion, Peace."

John gave her a little nod.

"Yes," he said, "but those are side issues compared with the main trend."

"Side issues!" she repeated, and Mrs. Frye echoed her.

"Not unimportant," he conceded, "not at all. But the point that has struck me since 1918 is that, without knowing it, we've really reverted to paganism. There's an earth spirit abroad. Don't you know there is? Don't you see the signs

of it? That's why quite nice girls go half naked and paint themselves to look like harlots."

That cousin in the rear rank gave a small staccato shriek like a frightened mouse. Mrs. Frye rose to her feet majestically and ejaculated his name, "John Blakesley!" But Bridgie put out a hand and touched her on her chiffon-clad arm. "There, there, mum," said he, "sit down." Bridgie was curious. He thought the cousin out of the West sounded rather a good sort, and he wanted to hear more.

"No, no," said John, "you don't get me. It isn't any conscious thing we're doing. We hardly know we're changed. It's just one of those mysterious reactions of nature. A lot of men have been killed off. Nature's got to supply the lack. So up comes the earth spirit out of the dark where she's always lying like—like Enceladus, you might say, in a volcano. Something has told her life is thinning out, and up she comes and sets us to dancing and gorging and drinking—Lord, I don't know what she doesn't do! And she doesn't understand it any more than we do when we obey her. She's just a force, you know—but pagan, pagan. Don't you see?"

They didn't. Mary, loving him the more for his boyish effort, recalled him again.

"The book, John," she said. "Don't get away from the book."

John looked at her again, frowning, and passed his hand across his forehead confusedly, as if he wished to heaven he had the sense to keep in straight roads where Blakesleys could follow him.

"Now," he said, "the book. I called it *The Girl in the Tree*. The girl was a dryad. She'd been touched by the earth spirit, too, and she got out of her tree where she'd been living in the cool for a million years and went wander-

ing. And of course she met a mortal and he fell in love with her, and imprisoned her in his conventions, and she was so unhappy—just like Cousin Sabrina, you know—that she never stopped wanting to get back into her tree. And she might have, you see, only when she'd got out she couldn't tell which tree it was, and when she knocked at the wrong trunks the dryads inside told her to go away."

"Dryads!" muttered Cousin Jos. He saw himself back on his collegiate excursions through classical mythology. "Naiads! Muses! There were nine of them." This numerical fact relating to the Muses seemed to be the only thing he had to cling to, and he kept on repeating it in an undertone: "Nine! nine!"

"Of course," said Mary, still bent on helping out, "of course they didn't know she was a dryad, the mortals. Even her husband didn't."

"No," said John, feeling himself rather a fool, yet following her lead, "and, once she was out of the tree she didn't know it herself. Only she was dreadfully unhappy, you see, and a tree—especially a beech tree—gave her an extraordinary feeling that it was home, and somehow or other she'd got to get inside of it. The book really is about her adventures, back and forth, how she tried to escape and finally how she did. And somehow or other it hit Cousin Sabrina just right, and she felt as if there were a secret for escaping, of running away for good, even if, like her, you were tied by both legs, and she—quite unreasonably, I own—thought she could come at it through me. And after a while, still unreasonably, she got to think other people could and my life ought to be smoothed out so I could help 'em."

"Well," said Cousin Jos, deliberately, as if he challenged

them all to deny his right to say it, "I never heard such damned nonsense in my life."

John looked at him assentingly. There was a faint, rueful smile on his face.

"Yes," he said, "I know how you feel. I should feel so myself. But that's really how it was."

Again Mary was ready, this time with her last hopeless gesture.

"I have the book here," she said. "John, I think you'd better read it to them." She took it from the table behind her and held it out to him, and, as he merely looked at it without taking it, added, in a low tone that seemed to hold some persuasive message he would have to recognize, "She'd like to have you."

Upon that he took the book, a square green volume with a tree in gold on the cover, and up in the right-hand corner the outline of a girl's face. It was not a large book, as Cousin Jos noted with relief. He was one of those who "hate to be read to," and he only submitted to this in the hope that it was, though inexplicably, a preliminary to getting through this befogged first issue to the question of wills. John began in a meditative tone as if he wondered as he went along what he might leave out. He didn't want to bore these people, but he had already accepted the attitude of men who love a motherlike woman in feeling that Mary must know best, and acquiescing in it. This was a June night, very still as to wind and outside sounds of any degree. It was a full moon that was going to be fuller, and Mary, from where she sat, could imagine its first glint behind the sycamore, and knew what light it would soon be pouring impartially, yet with inescapable power, over the terraced garden without. She was listening to him as he read, weighing every syllable, and yet her heart was running

on before him to a later hour when she knew, without spoken agreement, they would meet down in the grove where he had first kissed her. He read without any of the expedients of the elocutionist, rather monotonously, indeed, and feeling his way along the lines with a kind of interrogation as if he wondered, as much as Cousin Jos possibly could, why a book that seemed to him the most obvious thing to write could incredibly have had an effect on the robust fortunes of the clan. As he read they grew more and more subdued, perhaps not to him but to the stillness without. Only Mrs. Frye's buckram creakings were still evident, in time to her breathing, and once when they became too importunate Bridgie looked at her and frowned. The reading continued until after eleven and the book was not ended. John glanced up and asked:

"Shall I go on?"

"Go ahead," said Cousin Jos peevishly, and John could not tell whether he wanted an incomprehensibly foolish matter over and done with or whether the story of a dryad out of the wide freedom of her tree really meant something to him, and nerves not called on for years had begun to thrill. Had Cousin Jos a tree? And now the book was ended. John shut it with relief and laid it down on the table. For perhaps the first time in any assembly of their united forces, the Blakesleys were silent. Cousin Jos was the first to speak.

"Come," said he, with a roughness foreign to his customary utterance, "let's go to bed."

And still in silence the Blakesleys rose and filtered off upstairs. John and Mary turned to each other and stood, and when the last footfall had ceased he went to her and took her into his arms.

"Mary! Mary!" he said. "I was scared blue for fear you wouldn't be here."

"Where should I be?" she asked, looking up at him with the moved, adoring glance he remembered.

"I don't know. All I know is, I don't let you get out of my sight again till we're married."

"No," said Mary, "don't. I want to be married, too."

"Come on out," said John. "The moon must be ripping on the sundial. Do you s'pose it tells moon time same as sun time?"

He was beginning to be silly, and that Mary loved. But she would not go out to the sundial. He had been traveling for days, he had read nearly all night, and now he should go straight to bed; and though he protested, she had her way, saying if he wasn't tired she was, and he was going upstairs at once. Finally, on her mock terror at what Cousin Jos would think of their sitting up courting when it was now all hours, he did go, and she set herself to the casual fastening of doors that always seemed enough in the inclosed security of this residential calm. It was besides, she smiled to herself in thinking whimsically, a night when nobody would want to get in. On the contrary, everybody indoors would want to get out. She herself did. It had been a notable triumph of her own common sense, this bantering away from her the one creature in the house to whom, as she believed, magic and moonlight meant the sorcery they did to her. Still hand in hand with this inexorable common sense, she went upstairs slowly, in the measure of her unwillingness, and, broad awake, sat down by her window to muse. Not on the Blakesleys! that would bring discord crashing down upon harmonies, philistia itself striding into paradise. Yet she couldn't quite escape their aura, thinking, in spite of herself, of the amazingness of life which

rains such beauty down in a flood that is all but audible and still lets all the Blakesleys sleep. She almost imagined the combined volume of their snores. There she caught herself up. Mary was rapt into the upper spaces that night; she mustn't be vulgar enough for even the imagined realizing of a snore. She might find herself as Blakesleian as the rest of them. She sat there untired. When she thought of that bright vigil afterward, it seemed incredible that it could have been so long. What was she waiting for? The dawn? It wasn't so far away. Suddenly, as if the hour-glass turned, her mind turned with it. She was, she told herself, wild as a hawk. Why shouldn't she slip out and do a little wandering of her own? The moon was regnant. She went noiselessly downstairs and out at the door at the back of the great hall which led directly upon the terrace, and stole as softly down the path toward the little river, past the lilac groves and peony beds, to that smooth-swarded oblong at the right which she and Sabrina had called the Fairies' Ballroom; she crossed it and continued into the grove, still at the right, a grove of dense shadows and smooth, clean beech boles. She stood there for a moment, her hand on the trunk of a tree, feeling affectionate toward the tree and the dryad that owned it, but this was only because John had written about beech trees and dryads. And suddenly, as she smiled a little at herself, knowing she was a hard-headed young person to whom dryads were but the inherited phantasms of the poet's brain, her heart stopped a beat. Coming toward her between the beech boles was a figure in floating white, and Mary, terrified, knew she had to challenge it and did, in a hard, high voice that was half laughing and half afraid:

"Do you want to get back into your tree?"

The woman may have been as startled as Mary, but she came directly up to her.

"Oh, I don't know what I want," she said, in a voice as high and strained as Mary's own. "I couldn't stay in the house—the moon—everything. Did you ever see," she continued recklessly, as if Mary were her dearest friend and she made nothing of confiding in her, "anything so horrible as the way Jos Blakesley has changed?"

It was Milicent. She stood quite close to Mary now, and Mary, looking at her in the moonlight, thought she should never have known her. The unbound gray hair on her shoulders—a braid hanging from one side and the rest floating, as if she had begun it for the night and stopped midway—her great dark eyes, her trembling mouth, these made her inconceivably moving and strange. Mary had got back to her normal state of determined calm.

"You know," she said quietly, "I've seen Mr. Joseph Blakesley only within the last year."

"A god!" said Milicent bitterly. "That's what they used to say, a young god! Beautiful—his feet upon the mountains!" And then it seemed to come upon her that she didn't know what she was saying, and she put her hand to her heart in a gesture Mary found poignantly moving, and stood there and panted for breath. But she hadn't done. "We weren't first cousins even, but they said it was wrong for us to marry. We should have told them—" she hesitated here and broke into a phrase amazing from her lips—"to go to the devil, and run—run away. Escaped!"

Mary laid a hand on her arm.

"Somebody's coming," she said, in a warning tone.

It was a tall figure between the trees. Milicent turned and looked. It came rapidly, with long strides, and had not nearly reached them when she cried out piercingly:

"Joe! Joe!"

The figure came faster. It was Cousin Jos, in his shirt and trousers. Had Cousin Jos, Mary wondered, begun to undress and found the moon and the impulsion of dryads and trees too much for him? Had he, too, kept vigil? He went up to Milicent and took both her hands.

"I saw you go by under my window," he said. "Child! child!"

They stood there looking at each other, and Milicent was sobbing, little dry short gasps that must have hurt her horribly, as they hurt Mary to hear. And Mary at that instant knew Milicent, with a woman's wild unreason, felt it possible to go back through the road that had led to this arid corner and have him hers again. Could she do it? Could the man help her?

"You always suffered so, beyond everything," he was saying. "I never could bear it, darling."

At that word Mary turned and left them; she went back to the edge of the Fairies' Ballroom, and looked once over her shoulder. They were still there, but walking to and fro, and so near that she could believe his arm was about Milicent's waist. Now she smelled a cigarette and, with a wild certainty that somehow she must defend their solitude, she ran forward to the figure advancing toward her across the sward. It was Bridgie. He threw away his cigarette and put out his hands to her, exactly, she thought, with a wildness of her own, as Cousin Jos had done to Milicent. Still she went on. She was willing to clutch his hands and hold them if only she could keep him from charging upon that infinitely pathetic pair striving there in the moonlight to build up the dream towers of their ruined lives. She wanted, foolishly, to laugh. Would he have recourse to his pet formula whereby, for a couple of days, he had been

trying to establish some sort of amorous signal code with her? Would he call her a peach? And he did.

"Mary," he said—and for a minute Mary almost liked him because he sounded so boyish though hopelessly underdone—"Mary, you're a peach."

She accepted his hands and held them, and he was so overcome by her meeting him halfway that he stood there exclaiming, in a perfect surprise:

"You do like me, don't you? Mary, you do like me?"

"Not the least in the world," said Mary promptly. "I'm going to marry your cousin John. And you've got to get back to the house and go to bed. You're drunk. Everybody's drunk but me—"

"No! no! no!" he insisted, and kept trying to lift her hands to his lips, while she as steadily pulled them down. She clutched at all the synonyms for drunkenness she had ever heard, to convince him.

"You're slued, half-seas over, tight—and it isn't your body. It's your mind. Go back to the house and lock your door and throw the key out of the window and go to bed. I'll find the key in the morning and let you out."

"I don't know what's happened," he kept saying. "It's different, everything's different, everything except you. Mary, you're a peach."

"Don't you see what it is?" asked Mary sharply. "It's that book, *The Girl in the Tree*. The book may not be any great shakes, as John said, but somehow the idea of it in a time of the world like this, waking up the earth spirit and all—escape!"

"That's it," said Bridgie, almost moaning now. "You come with me, Mary. We'll escape."

He was dragging the more heavily at her hands, and she wondered, under the pain of her wrung fingers, whether

she ever could get away from him, when he suddenly gave a sharp little bark:

"My God! there's mother!" dropped her hands and raced headlong toward the house.

Mary began laughing hysterically as she stood there shaking the blood into her maltreated fingers, and Mrs. Frye, who had passed Bridgie without a word, came on and addressed her in a voice so moved with some unrecognized emotion that Mary ceased shaking her hands and stared at her. And it seemed a part of this mad night that she should find her in her nightgown, though unlike Milicent, she wore no kimono over it.

"Mary," said Mrs. Frye, "you shall marry him. He is a good boy. His mother tells you so. You shall marry him at once."

"But I can't," said Mary, adding perfunctorily, "I'm going to marry John."

Mrs. Frye did not seem to hear that.

"I don't know what it is," she cried brokenly, as if she were groping without hope after lost treasures,—joys she might have had. "But there's something the matter with us. What is it? O Mary, you tell me. You marry Bridgie and perhaps he can be saved."

Mary took her hand and led her to the stone seat by the sundial, and they sat down there and Mrs. Frye talked. Mary never would tell what it was about. She wouldn't even tell John. She said she couldn't. Once he gathered that Mrs. Frye was frank to a point of what all Blakesleys would have called indecency. She was not complaining, not repenting. She was simply bemoaning herself and the way the world was made. And having got the idea that you could escape—somewhere, somewhere—she insisted al-

most to the verge of hysteria that at least Bridgie should escape, for Mary would help him.

It was in the first dusk of daylight that Mary led her back to the house, the spirit gone out of her, blubbering faintly and longing only for her bed. Mary insists that during that vigil there on the stone bench she saw figures dimly in and out among the trees, other Blakesleys wandering up and down. Making love? She did not know. Repudiating their pasts and wondering if, though so late, they could run away? She did not know. But having led Mrs. Frye up the staircase to her room, she ran out again into the Fairies' Ballroom to see if she could get back her own composure from the rising sun. A figure was advancing toward her from the grove. It was Milicent, walking like the dawn, her face ecstatic. When she saw Mary she stopped and waited for her. Could that look, Mary wondered, be the seal of her triumphal possession of Cousin Jos? Women are strange things.

"Mary," said she, in a warm voice, hued like the sunrise, "there ought to be a service, a ceremonial. Out of doors. Like this. See. We must face the east."

She turned to the east and the blaring splendor of the almost vocally rejoicing sun. She lifted her arms, and the long sleeves, falling away from them, made the pose a statuesque beauty that should have been caught and kept forever. "Hail!" she called, in a voice so sweetly piercing that Mary trembled before the strange beauty of her. Mary, remembering John in there asleep and what gods he worshiped, lifted her own arms and cried, "Hail, Apollo!" It was antiphonal. Milicent was ready. "Hail, Apollo!" she echoed, and Mary followed, "Hail, O sun!" to hear Milicent, on the last note, "Hail, One God of the sun!" Then Mary, dropping her arms, turned and fled. She dared not look

at Milicent again. After emotion, she knew, comes shame, and she would not see that rapture wiped from Milicent's face.

It was solid daylight when Mary came down to find the dining room full of Blakesleys and the odor of toast. Somebody had ordered an early breakfast and Maggie, since it meant their going, had been desperately obliging in her haste. There were portmanteaus at the door and all down the steps. Motors were almost sobbing in their eagerness to get away. Only John of them all looked the serenity of the man who has slept through and awakened with an untroubled mind. He was standing by one of the porch pillars with Cousin Jos, and Cousin Jos looked older than Mary had ever seen him, ravaged and ugly. He was beating the nervous fingers of one hand on the pillar and telling John just what he had to expect.

"Once more," said he, "we shall give you a chance to settle out of court. Otherwise—"

John spoke with a quiet steadiness which, as Mary knew, covered a horrid discomfort of his own. He hated to hurt even a rich Blakesley by telling him he couldn't be any richer through him.

"It has already been settled out of court, so to speak. When I was here before, Cousin Sabrina made over the house to me, and the bulk of her property. The will covered only the balance, something inconsiderable—the legacies to you and the servants, and a small remaining sum to which I am residuary legatee. That was really all she died possessed of."

Cousin Jos did not look at him. He glared out into the sunshine where the motors were throbbing, and the skin seemed to tighten and dry all over his yellowing face. Milicent came out and he saw her no more than he did

the waiting motors, and she gave no sign of seeing him. He whirled about and addressed the Blakesleys crowding behind him on the upper step and in the hall:

"She has played it on us. Sabrina! Yes, I mean Sabrina. She gave the house and the bulk of the property to him before she died."

Milicent, drawing on her gloves beside the taxi she had ordered, uttered one word. "Why?" she asked in a kind of negligent scorn, not of Jos but of Blakesleys in general.

"I know," said Mary impetuously, from the top of the steps. "She told me. She said it would prevent trouble after her death."

Then Mary was aware of the Blakesleys stepping into motors but chiefly of Cousin Jos and Milicent going away each alone, he fussily tucking the rug closer about his thin, dew-stiffened legs and she sitting haughtily upright as if, now this particular exigency were over, she need never speak to any Blakesley again.

WAVERING GOLD

By

Edwina Stanton Babcock

AS the tall girl shuffled into the room she stopped to steady the large goldfish bowl held in her brown arms. She kept her face averted from the old figure huddled in the chair by the window, but she knew that the gray head with unkempt hair was raised, that two small black eyes regarded her coldly. Setting down the globe with its bright occupant, she started back toward the door.

"Here—leave that there door be!"

The girl faced the flabby hand waved authoritatively at her.

"Ain't you afraid of the draught?" she asked mechanically —"you'm always worryin' about it."

"You set right down there—I know you! It ain't draughts you'm thinkin' about; you want to git out and go back to where it's all goin' on."

The young face darkened. "Nothin' much is goin' on," the girl declared sullenly. "The auctioneer was there, talky and dressed up. I seen Mis' Began; she was countin' the towels in the upstairs closet. She had on that green-and-white striped dress. Mis' Harham and her girl come in. Mis' Harham wanted 'em all to pray for Dolling's sins, but the auctioneer laughed; he said she could do that after things was settled in the house. Myrtle Harham spoke to me—she's rill pritty, sort of like a Christmas doll. She had on one of them one-piece dresses, sort of lavender—lavender,"

continued the girl dreamily, as if the word soothed her. "Lavender goes good on them, now, light-complected people."

There was a moment's silence, the huddled old figure in the chair stared at the goldfish, whose strangely sparkling scales shot red fire through his water habitat; he passed in and out of his little shell house with the air of a leisurely sultan.

"What'd *you* git?" snarled the old voice. "Twarn't true, was it, that Dolling left the parlor furniture to King Reddy? Did King give you that there show-fish? Is that all he had fer you?"

"That's my business," snapped the girl. "It's dinner time a'ready."

With an impatient gesture she pulled out a table covered with mottled oilcloth. She spread on it a dark tablecloth none too clean. The old woman in the corner drew forth—from a debris of bread crusts, some empty medicine bottles, and two half-decayed apples—a pair of steel-bowed spectacles with rims turned black with age; she put these on to follow the silken evasions of the goldfish.

"So he shoved you off with such trash, hey—a trick goldfish!"

The girl paused in her listless movements; she was standing in front of a cracked mirror regarding her face long and wistfully. Once she pushed back her hair from a forehead finely shaped but knotted with her frown. For a moment she seemed to try to arrange the tangled dark locks in some fashion recently seen . . . then a furtive glance over her shoulder seemed to paralyze her hands.

"You hear me?" snarled the cracked voice. "Did Dolling leave you this here fish, or did King give it to you? Wa'n't there nothin' else, seein' I used to work to Dolling's place?"

"King give me the fish." The girl's voice was at first smothered, then something curiously sly crept into her tone as she wheedled, "Ain't it funny to think the gold on him is only artificial? They say it's the handsomest fish in the county! It sot on 'Dolling's grand piano in the best room fer I don't know how long. He idolized it."

But the yellow face did not soften at this statement. Mrs. Murtree kept black-eyed scrutiny on her daughter. "And so he give King Reddy everythin' in the house—is that so?" she demanded.

"That's what they say."

"The pianola? The sewin' machine? The canary bird? The standin' lamp with the parasol shade? King Reddy gets all the furniture, too?"

"That's what they say," the girl answered with pretended indifference.

"'They say,'" snapped the mother. "'They say'—well, they'll be sayin' a lot more before they get through; ef I could get down to Dolling's house—I'd 'they say' them."

There was no answer; the young woman, going to the rusty range, lifted a lid. "The fire's out," she muttered. "I better get some kindlin'." She moved toward the door; again there was the look of escape in her eye.

"Yes—and you'd be out too, if you could, and you wouldn't come back, neither—I know you, you young sliver. Now you take that chair and set down in front of me," commanded the old woman.

With a weak breaking of her full underlip, the girl slouched down on the rickety seat. "I thought you wanted dinner," was her peevish comment.

The sour black gaze fixed her; then Mrs. Murtree, leaning forward, announced pompously, "They was a pink-worsted African into the north bedchamber at Dolling's—many's

the time I seen it when I was scrubbin' there. Who got that there African?"

"King—*he,* now, give that to Mis' Harham—she was tellin' him how she's been crazy over it this long time." The girl looked thoughtfully at the goldfish sailing serenely around his aqueous circle. "Look how that there globe catches the light," she exclaimed—"like church glass, kinder, the way it shines."

"What's King goin' to do with old Mis' Dolling's sewin' machine?" her persecutor continued.

"He's been and give that to the Cousin a'ready. Seems that before the fun'ral the Cousin walked up to there from North Medwin, takin' on somethin' terrible. They say the Cousin was all sewin' machine. Seems that ever sence they was girls the Cousin an' old Mis' Dolling had it all laid out that whoever died first was to give the other one her sewin' machine or, ef 'twus the *other* one, her shark-tooth bangle."

A look of merciless contempt swept the wrinkled face, fastened on the irresolute countenance of youth.

"An' the clock into the settin' room?" Again the young figure stiffened under the remorseless inventory.

"They was all after that," Sade Murtree replied, "and the Chromo of Niagara and that painted fruit piece into the dinin' room; there was strangers drove twenty miles from Cone Center to get *that.* I heard Myrtle Harham ask King for the blue pincushion in the best bedroom—the one that was trimmed with them little pink roses. They was standin' there and King had the goldfish globe in his arms; he was goin' to carry it home fer me—but she, the Harham girl—well, I heard King say, 'Certingly you kin have it.' Then Myrtle, she wanted he should wrap it up in paper fer her, and so—so I come home."

The girl brooded for a moment on these matters. She

explained more gently, as one woman depending upon the understanding sympathy of another, "You know what King is. More like a gentleman, easy and free handed—can't say 'no' to anyone."

There was appeal in her voice, the appeal of a young puzzled soul to the wisdom and experience of an older person, but the heavy rap of the stick interrupted her. "You goin' ter set there all day or you goin' to git dinner?"

Mrs. Murtree, a dark scowl on her face, critically surveyed the goldfish. "Yes, I know what King is—I know what King is," she muttered darkly. "My sakes, but there's things I could tell! I ain't scrubbed to Dolling's house for nothin'—and now the old fool leaves him all this furniture ter shut his mouth—and the fool goes and give it away. Yes, I know what King is—I know *who* King is."

She sat looking curiously at the thin half-bowed back of the girl in her slow awkward movement about the room. Suddenly her attention was diverted by a graceful waving motion of the goldfish's tail; the curious metal-like burnish of the slim creature held her silent for a moment; but as if reminding her daughter of shame, she snarled again.

"Look at what King could ha' saved out of that house fer him and you! Him always hollerin' about wantin' ter marry yer—yet all he had fer you was this here—play-fish (not but what it's pritty), but like as not you'll have ter spend all yer time gittin' worms fer it and seein' the globe don't git broke."

The girl slammed down on the table a tarnished leaden castor in which the cruets, smeared with their own contents, leaned drunkenly toward each other.

"Dinner's ready," she announced; then spitefully, "Them fish doesn't eat worms, that's all you know about hist'ry—" then, her young face suddenly reddening, "and I don't want

you should speak so about King; don't you go devilin' in our business! Him and me can talk fer ourselves—we know what we want."

"So you think he's goin' to marry yer, hey?" jeered the old woman. "Well, he ain't; no more than soapsuds stays bubbles! Ask Myrtle Harham who he's goin' to marry!"

"He is too," declared the girl proudly. "We'm in no hurry—we can wait. King's sort of high-handed and peculiar." She groped in a mind unfed of holy symbols to shadow forth love, trying to express something of deep pride and confidence in this man so belittled, for what reason she knew not, by the neighbors. "King's more like a man in a magazine," she said at last, "he ain't all 'have and git'; like as not he's thinkin' how he can make fer others. He's like—now—books, and—now—strange cities." The girl drew herself up. "*You'd* have me married to Bunch Klatren, that big Swede with his red nose, just because he's got a furnishin' store and yer seen them green stair carpets unrolled in his winders."

As the two approached the dinner table Mrs. Murtree authoritatively silenced her daughter. "Now you shut up," she commanded with maternal majesty, but as she sidled into her seat with bored old country eyes she was still stealing glances at the goldfish, now austerely regarding them through the sides of his globe. He floated there, tail slightly waving, cold and haughty inquiry in the aquiline fish face.

"What's he want?" demanded Mrs. Murtree a little nervously. She cackled, "They can't hear, can they? He looks listenin'-like! Cute, ain't he?—switchin' his tail so—Well, look at that—!" The old woman suddenly raised her hands in admiring wonder. "Say, ain't that comical? Don't that beat the Jews? That animal—he gives me one look and then turns and goes back into that shell house, for all the

world like a—a minister! Say, he's quiet and perticler, ain't he? I mistrust they sort of guarded him up to Dolling's; seems he's used to high-life, kinder."

Mrs. Murtree continued to regard the goldfish; knife and fork in hand, she rested her elbows on the table, chewing. "Turned yer back on me, hey?" she demanded facetiously of the fish. "Lookit! Comin' out that door again! Well, I never; he's got a mind of his own, that there fish has—see him draw his tail through! Say, he done that as nice as I could myself. Now he lays there, thinkin'."

Mrs. Murtree, forgetting the viands before her, raised a coquettish horn-nailed finger at the occult eyes steadily regarding her from the goldfish globe. "Now then," she demanded a little sheepishly of the shape of wavering gold, "What you lookin' at? See anythin' green? You think yer own the whole world, don't yer?"

With a look of dull relief the girl took her own seat at the table. She had rolled up her sleeves, her round arms showing womanly lines. Her hair, swept off her forehead, was twisted into a rough knot; through its frank dark curl crept a hint of coppery light, but her eyes were thick, sullen with negations; her figure was cowed, without buoyancy, and piteously suggestive of rough treatment in childhood days.

The two bent to the speechless eating of lonely country houses. The girl, her head on her left hand, idly poked the unsavory food into her mouth; but the old woman, still dazzled by the golden streak of life flashing through the roomy clarity of the goldfish bowl, indulged in unwonted mumblings.

"Fish," at last she remarked sentimentally. "Fishin'! There, that's what he makes me think of—long-ago times when yer Paw cut alder rods and went down to the brook in the hemlocks to that there hole where the cows drinks

now." The toothless old jaw worked over its food for a moment. "That's a thing I never could eat, is fish; give me meat and fowls and I'll thank yer; but them brook fish—as I says to your Paw, 'they'm more like ornymunts, wavin' and shinin'," she continued with ostentatious virtue. "Fish in the sea, mebbe—hither and yon and wild in their way—them I might taste, but not them, now, tame fish that shines—I couldn't pick at 'em—I'd be too precious of 'em. 'T would be like eatin' true gold—gold," said Mrs. Murtree feelingly.

Watching her mother drink black coffee in slow gulps, the girl was moodily dumb. Mrs. Murtree tore a new fragment from the loaf, asking, "King goin' ter keep on workin' for Harham's now that Dolling has went? Tek care the Harham girl don't catch him! They say she's a great man-fancier."

Again the old woman's eyes fell on the goldfish. "Say—he heard that! Seems as if he understood everythin'. Look at him now."

To her daughter's listless surprise the old woman burst into a delighted cackle; she raised her wrinkled hands, clapping them, and sent forth her voice in a coaxing challenge, "Ere—kip—kip—kip!" Mrs. Murtree called it as in younger days she had called the chickens. "Say, what do yer suppose he eats? I could catch flies fer him. I dunno, would he take a bit of pie off me?" Excitedly she eyed the wavering gold.

The next day was Sunday. As the morning sun warmed the gray clapboards of the shabby house, King came. The tall, loose-jointed farmer, whose soft hat went up in a negligent peak, had tied a bright new four-in-hand round the collar of his flannel shirt. Though his heavy hip boots

were caked and cracked with mud, his whimsical face was shaved clean and showed healthily the even sunburn.

The ragged window shade ran up sharply; an old mottled face surveying him made King jump. The man's countenance changed but he stamped with easy country assurance up on the rickety steps and pushed open the door, shoving aside an eager chicken with his boot.

Mrs. Murtree, from the close-smelling room, greeted him excitedly, "Hey, there! Shut the door quick, can't yer—you want to let in all outdoors?"

The lank man closed the door with exaggerated care; he pretended fright by covering his head with his hands, saying jocularly, "Don't shoot." Then he stood with his back against the door, surveying the disorderly room.

"Where's Sade?" King lifted his glance to the dark, narrow staircase where he had so often seen her hesitant young figure come edging down. He turned to the old woman. "What you worryin' about the air for? It's Maytime, ain't it? Why, everybody down the road is settin' out on their stoops! Malden's son has sot up his radio and the folks is lyin' in their hammocks listenin' to it. What you 'fraid of in the air, anyway?" he persisted. "Air's all the rage nowadays—it's high-toned to be in it; the way some favors air you'd think it would pay to put it up in bottles and sell it like syrup."

But the man's future mother-in-law had no repartee equal to his own. She heard him with sour scrutiny. She motioned solemnly to where the goldfish lay seemingly inert in his globe. "Ssssh," peering from her chair. "Ssssh—step easy and see ef he's sleepin'—he's been awful nervous this morning."

Then she remarked as one bound to declare ignorance of the ways of wavering gold, "I don't know much about

the care of these here fancy fish. I ain't been educated up to 'em, but there ain't nothin' you can't tell me about air and I know that there ain't nothin' in God's world that air won't kill. Look at how cats catches cold—" Mrs. Murtree pursued scientifically—"I've seen 'em reel pinched with bein' in the open air; and the birds would have things different of they could—but they have to stand it."

King walked over to where the goldfish sailed serenely in its lucid pool.

"Myrtie Harham's!" she jeered. "Hey there!" King whistled to the goldfish. "Hey there, you stuck-up dude—pretend you don't know me, huh—? Hey there—Bill! Say, he knows, don't he?"

"Call him Lionel," objected the old woman. Her eyes were fixed upon the denizen of the globe as, respectfully, she spoke the name.

"Lionel, hey?" The man leaned upon the kitchen table, gravely listening as she explained.

"Seems he needed a gentleman's name. Sade, she didn't care. You know her ways—dumb when you want her to talk; talkin' when you want her dumb. So it seemed it should be me should pick out the name. I read in the papers and remembered fancy names on tombstones. So—'His name is Lionel,' I says. 'Lionel.' I says it just like that; and if that there fish didn't come around the side of the globe lookin' at me, just as wise! Sade, she didn't say nothin'."

Whereupon the tall farmer suddenly straightened. "Where's Sade?" he demanded again.

Mrs. Murtree raised her voice in raucous authority. "Sade! Sade! No, she ain't up above. Well, then it's likely she gone down to the graveyard to her Paw's piece—or sulkin'

in the cedar patch, maybe—you can't never tell where she's took the notion to go. Wild as a watersnake!"

Mrs. Murtree, her eyes on the convolutions of the goldfish, added sentimentally, "But I've noticed the young is always crazy fer new sights come spring and the bogs starts a hollerin'—Say, look at him now, *he* knows, don't he?"

For a moment King Reddy stood and gazed at this old-time enemy. He had had his own difficulties with Mrs. Murtree and he knew she knew his life secret: but their knowledge they had kept from the girl; so far at least they had tacitly agreed on that. And on this spring morning he was suddenly aware that the old woman had grown softer, than an acrid hostility, a jibing bitterness, such as only the country mind can evolve, was gone; the hard old eyes, following the yellow slant of the goldfish, seemed suddenly dreamy, unaware of his presence. "Wavering Gold" had put its spell on Mrs. Murtree.

The farmer opened the sagging door and took his booted way across the yard, where were strewn rusty cans and empty bottles and where the chickens and a few colorless rags on the clothesline emphasized the listless squalor of the place. With easy nonchalance King leaped the low fence that separated the Murtree home from its field surroundings; he started to a bit of wood known popularly as "the Grove." As he approached it the man's step did not quicken any, nor his head lift, but before he entered the circle of sun-shot sweet-smelling trees he gave a short whistle.

The whistle was not answered but the lanky figure stooped and peered into an inner circle of pines to where in a lonely little shrine sat the girl. She was twisting a bit of partridge vine in her hands, her murky brown eyes wide and brooding.

"Hey there!" King spoke with lightness.

Sade lifted her face; the man stood before her in abashed worriment.

"Now, there you are! Cryin' again! Ain't you terrible? Just like you was last Sunday—Why, girl, ain't you ashamed to give in like that?"

He stood there looking down at her, appalled at this thing women did—going off into the woods to cry alone! He took out his pocketknife; he stood there helplessly gashing at the bark of a white birch.

"Sade . . ."

"Huh?" listless eyes on the ground.

"What you cryin' about? Your maw been cranky again?"

"I'm—I'm discouraged," said the girl slowly—"I dunno as I ought to cry, but I'm—discouraged."

King looked grave. That she had reason for discouragement he knew; he tried to comfort her.

"There's a new nest in your honeysuckle over the stoop."

"That so?" heavily. "I dunno as I care—it don't make no difference to me."

King's practiced eye, however, detected that it did make a difference. He pursued his slivering of birch bark, drawing it off in long, skillful sheets which he tossed into the girl's lap, explaining facetiously, "Writing paper fer yer."

"Well, them little bird's nests is reel company once you take to noticin' 'em. The shape is pritty and surprisin', and ef it's a robin, why that blue paint on the eggs gives yer a new kind of wonderin' that yer don't have all the year round, and them little gawks of birds gappin' up fer food —well, I've forgot many a trouble rubberin' into birds' nests."

Then the man remarked nonchalantly, "Me—I'm out to get them trailin' Mayflowers this noon."

"Is that so?" indifferently.

He nodded. "First I thought I'd ask Myrtle Harham to go with me. Say, ain't she nice lookin', though?" He kept his eye on the drooping girl. "Says she can smell them Mayflowers afore they're up. 'Flower hound,' I call her. Well, that girl's smart round the house; her and her mother—what they don't bake! And as for cleanin'—why, it's somethin' terrible the way they clean!"

The inert figure on the ground stiffened slightly; a subtle smile of understanding came over the keen face of the man hacking at the tree. He continued, as if talking to himself, "But some girls is reel pushin', ain't they? Get and have. That's all it means to them. . . . She was all for goin' to *your* place—*our* place—where we found all them pinkest Mayflowers. She said it was 'common property'; said she had as good a right to go there as you. But that's where I thought different." King grinned, his mouth a crooked line of appreciation.

"'I don't know as anyone has got no call to look for 'em *there,*' I tolt her. 'That there bunk of Mayflowers,' says I (kind of tony-speakin'), 'was the discov'ry of a lady friend of mine.'"

"Yeh . . . ? You said that?" Sade looked up, a glimmer of mirth in her smoldering eyes; then the girl lifted her dark gaze directly to the man's face. "You—want to go down there to our place—now?" Her listless look was gone.

But King pared another long film from the white birch. "I ain't sure I could find my way *alone;* I'm awful timid in the woods. Of course ef I had comp'ny—" he answered facetiously.

The girl scrambled to her feet. She looked suddenly blown through as by a clean wind of humor and good sense; a new light like the wimple of a wayward brook shone in

the dense eyes. Suddenly she glanced down at her untidy dress.

"Look at me," she said shamefacedly—she turned her eyes with a need of criticism to him. It was as if she, continually flouted and scorned by her mother, somehow loved to quiver under his tender severity.

King's eyes traveled from the tumbled hair to the eyes with their dead-brown heaviness. "Ah, you can't help it," said the man compassionately. This was the thing Sade had often told him and he believed it. But, curiously, his lack of criticism filled her with more shame than the sharpest taunt. Into her swift perception flashed the daintiness of Myrtle Harham.

"I can. I'd ought to have took more care of myself," she murmured.

King fell into step by her side as they wandered where the trees thickened.

"It's your maw keeps you down," explained the man gently.

Of a sudden the whole passionate nature of the girl overflowed; she stood there in the woods gazing at him, her eyes wild with rebellion.

"King! She ain't never taught me right! I never knowed it till I seen them there movies down to the Center. But I seen how I was only a country jake—not—not like nice girls." She moved blindly like a child toward the man. "Oh, don't yer leave me, King," she sobbed, piteously.

The two did not touch each other; they stood in the strange silence of the trees, sacredly conscious, inarticulate.

"They said, the day of the fun'ral," the girl choked, "and maw, she keeps a sayin' that Myrtle—"

"I won't leave you," the man returned quietly, a curious hunger playing on his lean face. "It's just *me* you want,

ain't it? Now, your maw, she was jawin' me because I didn't save her Dolling's stair carpet and all—well," King made a curious gesture of disdain, "I ain't holdin' back stair carpets from them that hankers for them—I'd like ter give your maw a good stair carpet—but not—not just *that there one.*" He paused, looking at the girl narrowly. "Is it just *me* you want? Is it? Sure? This time, Lover—you got to be very sure—on 'count—well, on 'count different things. King don't—don't want to see you make no mistake."

She flung herself toward him. She put up a wild face so clean and utter in its abandonment that the man drew a quick breath and stepped away. He leaned against a tree, looking at her, breathing hard. Then suddenly he straightened and smiled. It was something bigger than the country girl could understand: only dimly did she feel that solemn Something in his kiss.

Myrtle Harham returned complacent from a somewhat exclusive gathering of arbutus. She had been hailed by this and that ranging party of village youth, but her training forbade association with those who made so merry of a Sunday. She stood primly while the band of boys and girls passed her, each with a round tight nosegay of pink flowers. Stepping daintily along the spring highway she held her little basket of rosy bloom, meditating upon the money she could get for it by standing it in the village drug store. The Harham girl had been to visit the Murtrees; she had had her own reasons for turning in at the slack, rope-fastened gate.

On reaching home for supper she related the story of old Mrs. Murtree's infatuation with the goldfish.

" 'Good evenin', Myrtie,' she says. Maw—her hair was all hangin' in her neck! 'Don't you want to set and watch my

fish menagerie?' she says. 'Ain't that there globe like a whole jewelry store,' she says, 'with gold watches swimmin' and divin'? Precious Gold,' she says, so comical."

Mr. Harham, a genial farmer with an air of well-being, caught at the material significance of the allusion. "If goldfishes was gold watches, she wouldn't never have had that one—poor soul—one of them wimmen over to Dolling's fun'ral would have got it out of King long ago." The farmer laughed at his own perspicacity. He looked at his two womenfolk, neat and fastidious, reflecting their artless satisfaction in their own behavior. His keen glance rested on his daughter.

"What you wasting time on King Reddy for?" He asked it rather sharply. "I seen you speakin' to him in the store. Ain't you ashamed, with that poor Murtree girl wild over him? I should think you'd be too proud, your kind, tryin' to rob that kind. King's no prize—he ain't far-witted about wimmen—you got a right to leave him be! Anyway, he ain't—"

Mrs. Harham, with compressed lips, rose.

"Daughter," said Mrs. Harham ostentatiously, "daughter, your holy prayers await you."

She spoke as if the holy prayers were a kind of salesman holding hats in an anteroom. Sweeping a look of possessive pride over the girl's blond head, Mrs. Harham meditatively watched her leave the room. When that correct damsel had disappeared she turned to the now sobered Mr. Harham, who quailed before her less lofty look.

"Say—what call have you got to butt in?" she demanded. Her eyes were powerful and steely.

Mr. Harham hitched his chair back to its front legs; he manifested discomfort.

"I was only tellin' her," he demurred. "She's got big

feelin's. She might make mistakes." The man looked honest concern. "They's some things you don't know," he stammered. "King Reddy's good-natured and nice spoken. It ain't no fault of his'n, but—but he ain't no good for Myrt—she can do better," declared the farmer proudly. "King," he quoted, pitifully derisive—"King-of-the-Cannibal-Islands, I guess—why, that feller's—" and then the farmer said honestly and sturdily a name at which countrywomen's faces stiffened.

For answer his wife softly turned the knob of the door and peered out into the hall. Assured that her pious child was not listening, she closed it again and stood, tall and obstinate, with her back to it.

"Then you ain't heard!" she said, and there was a trace of contempt at his slowness in grasping a situation. "You ain't knowed about the Dolling house being King's—lock, stock, and barrel—? You ain't heard the rumors about the will being made into his favor?—You ain't heard that Dolling was *King's father all the time?* That he, upon his deathbed, said so before witnesses? The mother was some furrin' woman out of England. Some says they was married secret—some says they wasn't."

Harham slowly opened his mouth, his kind, dull eyes fixed on his wife's shrewd ones. Then he stammered, "That was why King got the furniture and all—but they said—they said—"

"You—you poor dumb farmer!" Swept suddenly by fierce grandeur of ambition she leaned passionately toward him, whispering, "It's *true*. There's legal documents has proved it."

Ambition, which had been the sustaining force of Mrs. Harham's religion, now took other semblance. She gave gorgeous color to a new ritual as she enumerated:

"King's the sole legateer—everything's his'n—them farmlands, that rented mansion down into the town—a oil well the lawyers told about, the woods off to the west that we thought was private, and some rented stores down into Fairbanks County—it's all King's." She paused, a woman and a plotter, fixing him with meaning eyes, muttering vindictively, "That there sloven Sade!"

Vaguely the man caught her meaning. "But—he don't know," he protested. "He ain't never mentioned it to nobody."

"He don't know, don't he? He's plain' innercent. Why? Because he's got some looney idea of that Murtree girl takin' him fer *himself*. 'It was love of money and nice things that ruint my poor mother,' King says to me—just like that. She warn't nothin' but an ignorant girl. . . . He's tryin' to git that backwoods Moll to marry him against her maw's will and fer *love of him* and nothin' else. Ain't that a man's conceit for yer?"

Meanwhile, the little slack house where Mrs. Murtree held full sway seemed to undergo slow transformation. The thing began with the corner in which the rheumatic old invalid usually sat. Here was placed the glass bowl englobing Lionel, and here was manifested, day by day, the autocratic power of the goldfish. Lionel, it developed, wanted sun—he wanted to look out through a clean window pane. He wanted fresh flowers in a glass where he could see them through his translucent habitat. Lionel wanted much whistling and cajoling; the sight of faces peering through the globe was supposed to afford him peculiar pleasure. Wavering Gold!

Promptly at nine and at noon when the old woman had her own meals, Lionel had his repast; small bits of dried white paste were solemnly dropped to him amid loud

squawks of admiration of his high-bred intelligence as to where the morsels would fall.

At last Lionel was able to insinuate by sundry cold glances of his critical fish face that, though confined in a globe, he was awake to the more extended surrounding. It was to Mrs. Murtree alone that the sedate fish communicated his disapproval of the slatternly living room; she passed the information on to her daughter.

"Lionel, he come nosing round the side of the globe when you was down street; what must he do but look where you bin and left them dirty dishes on the table—and he turns away just as dignified—seems as ef he knowed them dishes wasn't washed.

" 'What you got in your brain now?' I says to him—'ain't any time the same to you, but you ain't satisfied without you see the whole house red up by nightfall?' "

Mrs. Murtree related the circumstance to her daughter; her garrulous old mind wildly impressed, she cackled over the goldfish's austere behavior.

"Much I care!" muttered the girl. She recklessly slammed the things back on the table.

In doing this she shoved the goldfish bowl backward. It slopped and spattered.

"Now look," her mother croaked. "Now lookit, you gone and got Lionel all stirred up; he's been nervous to-night anyways, and now you've made him worse."

"You and that goldfish!—I'd like to smash him on the floor."

And Sade stood there, one turbulent protest of enraged youth. The girl was a marvel of rebellion. Something defiant and vital burned in her—her white teeth set vengefully on her red lip, her body a fine co-ordination of resistance; and she steadied the bowl in her brown embrace like

some dark-browed Angel of Wrath holding the solemn sphere of dim creation. But ah, this was an uncertain angel that soon began to tremble, who only helplessly flared until the wild tears came. Sade stood there raging until the water in the goldfish bowl shook; it slopped over her dingy dress.

"Maw—I—I want you should leave me marry King Reddy. Now—now!" the girl suddenly screamed. But she could only repeat this wildly. She had no explanation. The burst of appeal over, she was the same pathetic creature who had gone to cry alone in the woods, only now her eyes were frightened; there was a note in her voice like that of a bird in the clutches of a hawk. Looking ahead with the desperate prescience of youth she could see the neat, calm person of Myrtle Harham like some deadly influence that could win away from her the one dear thing of her starved life.

"Maw—Mis' Harham wants King fer *Myrtle*. She told me so—I—I—thought she was jokin', and King he only laughed—but there's a change come. I heard folks talkin' into the store; I can't make it all out, but, O maw, *leave me marry him*—we could get along; King has got work."

The girl stood, a bit of agonized womanhood, before this parent who still controlled her. Suddenly and with a curious apathy she put the goldfish globe back on its littered table, the old woman watching narrowly the emotional condition of her treasure.

"King ain't nothin' to marry. He's a ne'er-do-well. I need you round the house. You can marry the Swede, that'll git you ahead in the world. . . . Now, you touch that there goldfish again—and I'll—I'll—" the mottled fingers seemed to itch for violence, but suddenly Mrs. Murtree bethought her of another way. The withered old face fixed the girl with an inscrutable expression as the sneering mouth re-

marked, "Marry King—hey?—King *what?* Ef you knowed what I know you wouldn't wipe your feet on him!"

The girl quivered. "You'm always sayin' that—what do yer know? Do yer suppose I care? I—" she swallowed pitifully, "I know King is good—good, do you hear? He's been like a sort of teacher to me, and, God knows, I ain't never had one—but Myrtle wants him and she'll get 'm, I tell you." The dark face broke pitifully under her despair. . . . "He was talkin' to her down street only this mornin'; she was in a pink dress, she had on a white hat with pink roses—and O mama, O *mama,* King didn't see me—he didn't *see* me!"

The girl, with an abandon as beautiful as it was abased, flung herself writhing on the dingy floor.

The mottled old invalid in the corner was silent, sure of her power. For a long time she looked callously upon the shaking, slender figure. At last she spoke in acute summing up:

"King didn't see yer, hey? Well, I could've told yer he wouldn't—Now maybe ye'll believe what I said was true—he ain't cared fer yer this long time; he was only foolin'—" Then, rising like a furious old Sibyl and leaning on her stick, Mrs. Murtree demanded, "Cared fer yer—hey? Then why didn't he give yer the sewin' machine? Cared fer yer? Why hain't he give yer the pincushion? Cared fer yer? —How about that there stair carpet? Why, he's only—" And then Mrs. Murtree said the word that countrywomen's faces stiffened at.

"One goldfish in a globe!" With biting sarcasm the old voice rasped out, "One goldfish in a globe, and with that he throws yer over and takes up with a new girl. I s'pose he's had all he wanted out of yer." The sour black eyes looked with harsh curiosity upon the shrinking form. . . . "So,

you ain't good enough fer him, hey?" went on the sneering chant. . . . "One goldfish in a globe, and with that he throws yer over. Where's the sewin' machine? Where's the African? Where's the—?"

Mrs. Murtree would once more have enumerated the desired gifts from Dolling's house, but the girl stopped her. She suddenly rose from the floor like one gone frenzied; she descended upon her mother menacingly. Her fist was clenched, she bent a brow of fury upon the mumbling old figure.

"Ah!" she said, her lips shaking—"ah, I can't stand it, I tell you, I can't stand it. Why—I— don't care what I do!"

Sade Murtree looked furiously about her once more—the shining globe arrested her eye; she was rigid, white with passion. "All right, then," she muttered recklessly—"if you don't care for it—why, this is all I think of what he give me. I don't need no Lionels!"

The goldfish globe, like a terrible symbol of frustration, was held high and dashed shiveringly on the floor. Two ignorant countrywomen confronted each other in all the trembling horror of their helpless rage.

"Wavering Gold!" The fish, in its slippery terror, flopped in bruised agony on the floor.

The girl, like an enraged animal, burst open the door and shot out into the silver night; the old woman, in shudderings of pathetic age, began to creep about among bits of glass and a welter of water to rescue that one bit of life and color that flopped in a fish panic over the dirty floor.

"Lionel—oh, ain't she awful? Ain't she awful? Lionel—Lionel, are ye dead? Wait till I strike a light—Hon—No, that there ain't the matches. Where did I leave 'em lay? Lionel, are ye alive? (Oh, I dunno how much a gold-

fish can stand.) Are ye frightened, Hon? There, that's the best I can do for ye. Oh my sakes! I could have her in the lockup fer this! There, Lionel, pretty, now I got yer. . . Don't be afraid, Lionel. There—there—!"

At last the moon, shining through the little kitchen window, saw the gasping Lionel safe in a large yellow mixing bowl filled with water slightly tepid to relax his shattered nerves, and set close to the old woman slumped down in her chair, sighing and groaning.

The colloquy that took place at the Harham barn where King lived was brief and human. The man, wakened from a deep slumber by steps running down the road, looked out upon the moon-washed night. Only once, where a form stood swaying, had he heard a familiar whistle. If that whistle should penetrate to the smug bedrooms of the Harhams! King, flinging on clothes, thought of this.

"Sade," as he stole quickly down the creaking steps of the carriage house, "Sade, for God's sake, stop that whistling! Are yer gone clean crazy? My God, girl, what's the matter?"

The bright moonlight showed him her slight form hatless, her hair streaming. In the eerie light she was a Bacchante maddened and impassioned.

"Sade?" questioned the man once again. This time there was that in his low voice that had always controlled her. King looked hesitatingly over to the Harham farmhouse where all night long a light burned in Mrs. Harham's virtuous window. He imagined that face, cold and dominant, rising suddenly from its pillow; he dreaded even now seeing it peer forth from the window. All the watchful meanness of the man's country environment warned him of Sade's danger, of more misery and loneliness for his girl.

He spoke sternly to the now shivering figure. "Sade," the man whispered quickly, "ain't you crazy to come here this time of night? Don't you never dare do this again."

He thrust an arm under hers and commenced leading her away. Once more he spoke reproachfully to the now shivering figure.

"This time o' night—them Harham wimmen's tongues—don't you never dare to do this here again."

She whimpered and buried her face in his breast; he tried to lift it, to bend it back, speaking in his whisper, "Ah, Sade, you'm cryin'!" It was as if he had never before seen the poor child cry. "Here, come to King—why, King won't leave 'em plague yer—!" The man cast his face up to the sky—*"Guy darn 'em all!"* he prayed devoutly.

But this time the crying was so convulsive and frenzied that the lover was nonplussed.

"What's she been sayin' ter yer now?" King demanded fiercely. "Say, I'd give her a little sass back once in so often. Why, Sade, it's only religious to stand up fer yerself and give the rest of the world rats."

"The goldfish—I—slung it on the floor!"

He found he could not turn her homeward, though as he talked he was gently trying to lead her there.

He paused, looking at her; something had happened that was worse than anything that had happened before. He had never seen her like this—like an enraged animal bent on self-destruction, like someone running to fling herself on the Dark!

In the moonlight he scanned her, saying suddenly, "Let's go back up to my place—it's warm there and you'm shiverin'—we could—we could . . ." but when she started to go her piteous willingness showed him instantly that this must not be. The moonlight on those desperate eyes illu-

minated his responsibility. "No, that won't do," he decided abruptly.

"Now, Sade, what's King goin' to do? You ain't acted sensible, Dolly. . . . Now, now," soothingly—"shut up. I ain't scoldin' but you'm frantic. I'm 'fraid fer you. Now, Sade—you got ter mind. I'm goin' to take yer right back home and spend the night on the lounge to yer house. Ef she jaws, I'll jaw back—and you can jaw too, hey? Does that suit?"

But even as he pleaded the man was firmly turning her bewrayed steps homeward. King knew his country standards. It was long after midnight, almost three o'clock, yet a belated farmer's automobile with its cruel searchlights might this moment be picking them out on the illumined road.

Up the silver way they drifted; the man with an effort kept his arm away from the girl's bowed form. However, when they paused in a shadow made by a giant sycamore he suddenly grasped her, and she clung to him. He felt her young body leap.

"I smashed it—I smashed the globe," she sobbed. "Lionel, he's out on the floor flappin'; but she plagued me about you—she, she said things—and you wasn't there, and I didn't know—there wasn't nothin' else ter smash," continued the girl desperately.

"Nothin' else ter smash?" The tall man chuckled. Safe in the shadow, King rocked her in his arms. "Nothin' else ter smash, hey?" He grinned up at the few faint stars. "Hadn't nothin' else ter smash so yer had to spoil King's present—the *only thing he ever give yer*—" he waited, meaningly. "You hain't really done that, Sade, smashed the goldfish and all? You little terror! Say, I bet she wanted ter skin yer!"

He crooned over her. "Cry all yer want ter," he said tenderly. "She ain't got no right to act so—well, you'm King's wife— or will be termorrow, and then what?"

The girl's face awed in the moonlight, turned on his breast to look up into his own.

"Married?" she breathed. It was easy to see what the thing meant to her. . . . "Married—*us?*"

A look of whimsicality stole over his features.

"You'm reel proud to marry me, ain't yer? Why, you'd go straight off with old King without nothin'—you dare? O Sade, you dare ter take a poor old tramp like King?"

She gasped so happily, clinging to him, that what he had to do grew harder, well-nigh impossible.

"O King, you didn't speak ter me—this morning, and I thought she, Myrtle, was—" she buried her face on his arm. "She looked so nice; I was a-comin' along and I had the dinner basket and it was heavy, but you didn't see me—Myrtle—she looked so—so awful pritty."

King shook her very slightly. "Say, are you growed up," he asked scornfully, "or are yer a little girl that's afraid of bears? Myrt Harham—well, she's smart—she had it all laid out, I bet yer, her and her mother; they was askin' me would I take her for housekeeper, now that I—"

Suddenly something peculiar came into the man's face; he lifted the girl's clinging arms and stood her away from him saying gravely, "Now, Sade, we can get married at sun-up this mornin'; the not'ry gets to his office at nine and then you and me will belong to each other without nothin' else in the world—nothin' but my job up to Harhams."

Absorbed and happy, the girl was oblivious of his scrutiny of her. Out of her untutored experience she began to plan. "I could take in washin'," she declared soberly. "Maw ain't never learned me to do nothin'; but come summer, I could

raise flowers and sell 'em. I could raise them strict-eggs like Myrt Harham does," she finished with growing spirit.

The thing King looked for, the thing he sought hungrily in her voice and eyes was there. She was ignorant of his new possessions, ignorant of the tragic thing that entitled him to these possessions.

For a moment the man hesitated, looking far ahead of him to the rim or the eastern horizon where the faint orange color of dawn began to burn the sky.

"You see that light where the sun's comin'? Well, I've heard it said that no man will tell a lie when the sun's comin' up, though they'll tell plenty as it's goin' down. Cur'ous, ain't it? Now," said the man slowly, "that there sun-up is our Weddin' Day, and I'm goin' ter tell the truth."

He dropped the two cold, thin hands. An expression of curious agony stole over his face as he stared on at the dawn, saying resolutely, "Put yer mind on this, Dolly, and think hard about it, like yer catechism. Sade, lovey, King ain't—nobody—King ain't never belonged to nobody—!"

He saw the girl's figure blurred in the dawn against the gray of the stone wall; his own eyes blurred as he dropped his head like a stalwart boy, gravely confessing the piteous thing. . . . King stopped and bit his lips, trying to face this untutored girl, as he muttered, "My mother was . . . well, Dolling was the man who didn't marry her; he leaved her die—nobody knows where—how!"

He shivered. The advancing dawn showed him something startled in the girl. Inwardly cursed, he saw how the hand that had tortured his mother now laid its shadow on his wife-to-be. But in the dawn he looked with solemn bravery upon her.

"But we ain't that," he said. "You and I are *us,* and

we'm clear of it. That's why the farm and all come to me," he finished gravely. "You didn't know all that? Well, there's time enough, but that's why I give away all that household truck. I couldn't a-bear it; it shamed my mother and it shamed me. I can git you more—do you care?" the man asked wistfully.

In their wonder at the strange things life did, they stood hesitating. The grand color in the east broadened, a pure light crept up the fields of dawn. King, in the early spring daybreak, saw fresh cloverheads beaded with misty dew. He strode across the stone wall, picked one of them—handed it, cold and pure in its rose color, to the girl. "It's our engagement," the man said with a curious dignity. "We was engaged anyhow, but to-night when you come to me—like that, and I scolded yer, why I see I was yer husband before God and man."

She nodded happily, dumb with his mastery of affairs.

"You wanted me when you thought I didn't have nothin'?" It was his one thought; he adored her for it.

The girl nodded, her young lips curved ready for happiness.

"Then," said King, eyes shining, "we'm engaged and the Harhams can talk till they'm black in the face. Now we'll go up ter your house; we'll bang on the door and, well—your maw—she can come to the weddin' ef she wants to, goldfish and all! And ef she jaws, you'll jaw and I'll jaw, too, see?"

There was such new genius in the assurance he now wore that when at sunrise they stepped upon Mrs. Murtree's doorsill and her angry head darted from the upper-story window, even Sade did not flinch.

"Don't yer dare set foot here," rasped the familiar voice.

"King Reddy, I know you—and you, girl—. Don't yer come in here for no more fish murder, you Cains and Abels!"

But the respectful son-in-law-to-be knew well how to employ the oil of sympathy.

"Sade's come back, Mis' Murtree. . . . She was took a little nervious, I expect—but I been talkin' to her and she's reel miszable—so now we'm goin' ter git married to-day. I thought I'd hitch up and take ye both along and we can give her fits—What say? What say we make a sort of cruise of it?" he repeated.

Those blue eyes, full of a square dignity Mrs. Murtree could not mistake, impressed her. She was aware also of a new pride in her daughter, who did not release her hold of her lover's arm. This to the old gray head above spelled correct things. Moreover, things there were of whose worldly import Mrs. Murtree had not yet time to take in, but of which she would gladly know more. Wavering Gold had changed her.

"Sade ain't got no clothes to be married in," she replied tartly. "I ain't fit to go nowheres. Lionel—he's actin' funny this mornin'. . . ." At the thought of Lionel the wrinkled old face quivered. . . . "I'm all broke up with nursing him," she despaired. "He needs young life."

Then King Reddy proved that unwitnessed strain of blood within him. His manner was solicitous and gentle; the girl, watching him, felt suddenly remorseful for her own roughness but it was his teasing that saved the day, for he smiled openly at Mrs. Murtree. "Lionel's all right," he declared—"them goldfishes is made on wires; but I know high-toned folks, like you and Sade, is always needin' more clothes." He appeared to reflect a moment. "Of course I don't say you won't see sumpin' in the stores you might take a notion to. . . ." The man gave a curious laugh as he

added, "Wimmen's taste runs into them things. Now, me, I ain't got no clothes fit to be Sade's husband. . . . What say we all git what's goin' and I'll—well, maybe I can manage to pay fer it."

It was King's first swagger. He looked shrewdly up at his old-time antagonist; he dared her. Something passed between them of recognition and understanding.

Then the old woman disappeared.

"She's gone to tell Lionel," said King. He winked and slapped his leg.

"Lionel!" Sade threw back her head and laughed.

Then they stood before each other, walking little steps away, then back to each other.

"And now you kiss me," instructed King.

Mrs. Murtree, in her excitement, left them to look at her pet. "As long as *you* ain't mad," she crooned. "As long as *you* ain't dissatisfied, Lionel."

WILD GEESE

By

Charles Caldwell Dobie

THE cloud that at noon had passed like a slow-moving black swan over the desert town of Mesquite, by three o'clock had assumed the proportions of a huge drawn shade; ten minutes later it was raining, and in another ten minutes crystal-clear again with the heat sucking greedily at every drop which a capricious sky had let fall. But the scent of moisture on sagebrush and withered stubble released a pungence worthy of a far more generous baptism. It was as if the parched country, yearning mightily toward greater refreshment, had clapped its withered hands together in a sudden delirium of joy. A little shiver of delight ran through the poplars huddled near the water-tank and overhead a mounting meadow lark laughed out a brief rapture.

Jane Bradford, locking the door of the sun-bleached school-house, was too late to catch the thrill of rain upon her upturned face, but the lingering ecstasy of the spent shower had power to set her pulses leaping. If only, like the meadow lark, she could have given voice to her joy or, better still, wings to carry it up, up, and over the crest of the blunt scarred hills to freedom! . . . But she was still too young to be cheated of all demonstration and, facing about, she ran swiftly in the direction of home. Midway in her flight past the station she halted; what would the inhabitants of Mesquite think of their school-mistress? For a moment the

question sobered her but the next instant she was on her way again, in full flight, the soft white folds of her skirt whipping the air with the grace of a bit of drapery from some Attic frieze.

She was breathless when she reached her door and glad of the shade of the cottonwoods which threw grave shadows across the threshold. When, upon the death of her father, she had come in from Saltine Valley to Mesquite to take charge of the district school, it was these two cottonwoods that had decided her habitation: they seemed like sentinels standing guard over the gaunt, sun-bleached house they sheltered. Citizens of Mesquite had protested her choice: a lonely cottage detached from the ugly ripple of the town was no place for Jasper Bradford's daughter. But she knew better: if her imagination read security into the presence of two tremulous cottonwoods, security was there. They let her have her way, with the gentle tolerance of the West, remembering that the Bradfords had always stood apart from them, especially the mother; assuredly, the mother never had taken root in her adopted country and Jane Bradford's whimsy concerning the trees was not surprising: Mrs. Bradford had been like that—full of quaint fancies—

To-day Jane Bradford found these two friendly trees more gracious than ever. The sun had not yet penetrated their green reticence and, as a breeze swept through them, the ground beneath sparkled with raindrops. It was as if they had hoarded this moisture for her special delight. In acknowledgment she lifted her face to their cool touch, drawing in deep breaths. Would her desert-bred soul ever quench the thirst that had been denied it? As if in mockery the same breeze which had shaken the trees free of their refreshment grew suddenly hot with dry pungence of greasewood and stubble. No wonder her mother had withered under

the desert's arid touch—a woman reared with the tang of sea-mists in her nostrils! And in the indignant heat of this reminiscence she pushed into the house.

Inside, the tragic memory of her mother still clung to her, reinforced by the two household gods that had made life tolerable for the exile. There upon the table lay the conch shell, brought by a great-uncle from some fortunate excursion to the West Indies; and on a narrow shelf, in a conspicuous place of honor, stood the model of the good ship *Ariel* with an uncertain history that made any glory possible: talismans which under the spell of intense and bitter longing so often had brought the cool ripples of an imaginary sea splashing over the moistless sands of Saltine Valley.

The air of the low room was stifling. Jane Bradford opened all her windows and a truant gust circling the four walls caught the limp sails of the *Ariel,* transforming it into a thing of buoyant and incredible life. The illusion of swift flight was so intense and startling that Jane Bradford clapped her hands together in a gesture half pleasure and half fear; for the moment it seemed as if it might elude her, as if under the spell of some desert magic it would sail off and be swallowed up in a distant and faint mirage. But the next instant the sails were empty and the miniature ship again floundering in a tragic calm. Jane Bradford's hands dropped to her side; she felt that something eerie and mysterious had passed her, and in a rush of motionless wonder she stood transfixed until the dim realization that somebody was tapping discreetly at her door roused her.

The knock came again, this time with a vigor which seemed to proclaim that the intelligence behind it had definite and positive knowledge of her presence. She wavered a moment, resentful of an irrelevant visitor breaking in on

a mood so fragile and precious. But, realizing that there was no escape, in the end she threw open the door. On her threshold stood a strange and very self-contained man with a pale face and a crop of burnished hair which frequently goes with such a complexion; a male, still on the borderland of youth, in a smart tweed suit and tan spats—a thing as alien and foreign to Mesquite as the midsummer shower which had just spent itself, or the conch shell upon her table, or the model of the good ship *Ariel.*

He looked up with a twinkling glance and he said with an air of absolute candor:

"I knew you were inside the house because I saw you running toward it, not five minutes ago. . . . Do all the inhabitants express themselves so gaily?"

She colored. "It was the rain," she explained simply.

"Rain!" he scoffed. "You don't call *that* rain!"

"It's as good as we can do," she returned defensively.

"I hate to disillusion you," he ventured, "but it was a very poor performance . . . an extremely poor performance; the rain, I mean. You, of course, were magnificent. It moves me to wonder just how you would react to a cloudburst."

She decided to meet his impertinence seriously. "I'm not sure, but I fancy I should die of joy," she answered, looking at him squarely.

He slipped easily from the traces of her gravity. "Well, we'll not order a cloudburst, then! At least not until we've come to some sort of terms. . . . You see, I only go in for death as a last resort—after every other persuasion has failed. . . . I suppose there's no doubt about your being the person I am looking for." He consulted a card. "Bradford—Miss Jane Bradford?"

He puzzled her into an acceptance of his banter. "No doubt that I know of," she threw back.

"And that you own a ship's model?" She assented. "Well, I've come several thousand miles to see it."

He made this extraordinary statement in a tone as casual as if he had said, "I hear you have a room to let; may I look at it?"

She fell back a little, wondering if he were quite a safe person: madmen always had been one of her special terrors. But his auburn eyes glowed so mellowly that she decided to chance him. . . . He entered the room with the faintest suggestion of a swagger and she saw that he carried a walking-stick. A walking-stick in Mesquite! He *must* be mad!

She went over to lower the shades while he appraised her habitation with well-bred interest. She felt distinctly annoyed. For, back of the almost casual estimate of her surroundings, she could sense a swift and unerring discernment. It wasn't fair for a stranger to attempt to discover *anyone* so promptly.

But she forgave him once his eyes had fallen upon the model of the good ship *Ariel*. A sudden wishful light that just missed rapacity crept into his eyes; he leaned back on his cane with an air of weary skepticism. She crossed over and took the ship's model in her hands. He caught his breath, as a hunter does who waits to see the effect of his rifle shot. Then, as she surrendered it to him, he released a long exquisite sigh of satisfaction.

For a moment he seemed content just to stand there in an attitude of intensive contemplation. It was her turn to hold *her* breath: she never had seen quite such calm rapture. . . . He moved finally and set the coveted treasure down upon a table where the sharp desert sunlight gilded it to

a twofold glory. She fell discreetly back, watching him trace its buoyant outlines with a sensitive finger, almost as a blind man might have done.

Presently he turned and said to her:

"I've been ten months on the trail of this model. Tell me, how did you come by it?"

She sat down, motioning him to a seat opposite her. "It belonged originally to my grandfather, I believe."

He deserted his post with reluctance. "Ah, an heirloom, I see!"

She gave a pointed laugh. "Oh, much more than just an heirloom. It's my complete inheritance! That and a conch shell!"

He was on his feet in an instant, following the lure of her upraised finger. "A conch-shell. . . . How quaint! How absurdly quaint!" And with boyish eagerness he lifted the conch shell from its dusty place on the walnut writing-desk and listened to its imprisoned tempest. She smiled back at him as he laid the shell aside. He looked at her sharply. "The sea is a passion with you, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said faintly, turning away as if he had suddenly uncovered a weakness.

He resumed his seat. "Well," he began easily, "it's a passion with me, too. I come from Cornwall and it's in my blood. Matter of fact, I should have followed it but a lot of tiresome things interfered." He broke off and ran his lean white fingers through his red hair. His gesture was eloquent of defeat. "As it is, I can only play with the sea. So I run about the world collecting toys. It's great fun!"

"Toys!" She lifted puzzled eyebrows.

"Why, yes—don't you understand? Ship's models—like the *Ariel* there—your *Ariel*."

She saw a sly crafty look creep into his eyes and felt the instinctive fear a mother feels in the presence of a stranger who casts covetous glances at her child. She rose deliberately and set the *Ariel* back in its place on the mantelpiece, saying as she did so:

"You can't fancy how fond I am of it. Nothing would induce me to part with it—*nothing!*"

She had expected him to be abashed by the vehemence of her outburst, but instead he nestled in his chair with an air of half-contentment and half-patience. It was plain that he was preparing for a long siege. "Naturally you're fond of it," he assented dreamily. "Who wouldn't be? Of course you know its history."

"No, and I'm not sure that I want to," she flung back, moved by an irrational fear that facts might rob her of right to its possession.

He opened his cigarette case and waited for her consent to smoke as he said blandly:

"It's what is known as a prisoner's model. A beautiful example of an English frigate done in 1803. It's got a sprit sail top-gallantsail that is enormously interesting. I've only seen one other of that period as stunning and that's in the South Kensington Museum. . . . So you see, you've really got something quite ripping."

She felt relieved: so far there was nothing in its history at odds with her rights to ownership. And it was intriguing to learn about it—made by a prisoner and all, the sprit sail top-gallantsail included. Not that this last mattered except that she liked the sea going sound of it. She passed him a half-filled matchbox. He nodded his thanks and lighted a cigarette.

"I first heard about it at Marseilles. I was talking ship's models with an old American sea captain who had retired

and was being dragged over every Cooks' tour in existence by a chit of a granddaughter. He remembered distinctly seeing this model in somebody's home in Gloucester. He described it down to the last detail; there wasn't even a ratline missing. When he got through I said to him, 'I'm going over to Gloucester to get it!' He thought I was mad, of course. And as a matter of fact I was. Every collector is that and worse!"

He closed his eyes as if the very memory of his pursuit had exhausted him and she put in gently, "And what happened when you got to Gloucester?"

He revived languidly. "The usual thing. I ran around in circles. I talked to anyone who would listen to me, beat upon strange doors, frightened lone women half out of their wits at all hours of the day and night in an effort to locate my quarry. Everybody voted me crazy. Finally a deaf old fisherman gave me a clue. He'd seen, or heard, or dreamed about such a model, I couldn't quite gather which. On one point he was very definite: he was sure it had been shipped West—when, or how, or why, he couldn't remember. I made more inquiries. One fact lead to another; people began to remember. I ended by establishing quite a case. At least I confirmed the sea captain's story: there *was* such a ship's model and it had once been in Gloucester. It seemed reasonable to suppose that it was now somewhere in the West. But when I inquired about the West everybody seemed very vague? I discovered the West wasn't a locality —it was a state of mind. Chicago, Omaha, San Francisco—they were all West. At least they were west of Gloucester. . . . There was only one thing for me to do and I did it: I came West!"

"Stopping at Chicago, Omaha, and San Francisco?" she threw in with faint amusement.

"And way stations—almost all of them. But ship models grew scarcer and scarcer until I arrived in San Francisco; then things began to look up. I went around to second-hand shops and antique dealers and auction rooms. There were tons of ship models and other things. In fact, the other things were much more intriguing than their ship models. I bought no end of rubbish: egg-faced studio dolls; fat Chinese gods; a Russian icon from some Alaskan church; a fan that had once been the property of the Empress Carlotta. But one simply *had* to find an excuse for hanging around as I did, asking foolish questions.

"Finally, one day in a hotel lobby I met my man—a mining prospector cracked on the subject of ships. He said at once, 'I know where that ship model is. It's in the Saltine Valley. I saw it ten years ago at a farmhouse owned by a man named Bradford. It was so strange, stumbling onto a ship model in the heart of a desert. I tried to buy it, but it belonged to the man's wife and it seemed nothing would induce her to part with it.' And, would you believe it, he tried to persuade me not to bother further? He seemed to think that because he had failed, I should too. I never met anyone so absurd!"

Jane Bradford stirred, resting her chin—half reflectively, half defiantly—on her up-poised palm. His placid arrogance was enormously irritating and yet a certain admiration swept her as she said:

"I'm sorry . . . tremendously sorry . . . but of course—"

He cut her short. "My dear young lady, don't put yourself on record. It so often ends in such complete humiliation."

She drew herself up, looking down on him pityingly. "Ten months on a wild-goose chase!" she said with faint mockery. "It's too ridiculous!"

He half closed his lids and she could see his glance fixed pensively on his quarry. "Why ridiculous?" he drawled. "It's not on record that a wild goose has never been caught."

"Oh, if one had a lifetime, I dare say—"

"That's just the point: I have!"

Her answer was a rippling laugh keyed to a high note of derision.

There seemed no end to his audacities: point-blank without any preliminaries he said:

"Would it be too much trouble to ask you for a cup of tea?"

The prospect dismayed her but, remembering the simplicity of such occasions in all the English novels of her acquaintance, she decided that her austere pantry would yield that much hospitality. Indeed, she managed so well with her thin slices of buttered bread and her pot of strawberry jam and her brewing—at his request—of the strongest and blackest tea she ever remembered having seen that for a season he seemed to be beguiled from his original quest. But when he left he cast such longing glances back at the narrow shelf enshrining the good ship *Ariel* that she felt all the delicious cruelty of a sovereign who could distribute or withold favors.

Afterwards, in the brief desert twilight, she recalled again the delicious thrill which had come to her on the wings of the places he had mentioned: Gloucester, Marseilles, Cornwall! Contacts—that was what the sea meant to her—a force which could touch all the far places of the earth: a fluid thing, changing, flowing, ebbing, without limitations; something mysterious and impalpable which the *Ariel* embodied. And she knew at once what the graven image of

a tribe signified. The *Ariel* was her graven image, as it had been her mother's before her: the evidence of things that lay beyond reach, that always would lie beyond reach.

She remembered now that moment, years ago, when she first had seen this graven image of her mother's desire. She had looked at it with the dim comprehension of a child, unable to formulate her reactions, yet feeling a racial reaction stir her. Yes, always the sea had captured her imagination, yet it was not until her sixteenth year that she had had her first glimpse of it. They had gone, she and her mother, to a little white strip of beach lapped by the Pacific and her mother's joy at returning, even briefly, to her lost inheritance was moving and pathetic.

At first Jane Bradford had been disappointed, naturally; only a dull anticipation ever is completely satisfied at realization. It had been a gray-soiled day for one thing and the water had stretched out before her in turbid colorless inertion—and this with her expectations keyed to something thunderous and glittering. Later, of course, she came to know its iridescences; its purple and green splendor; its frothing gaiety; its sky-blue calm. A fresh revelation for every day, a discreet withholding of its infinite secrets, a thing synonymous with the perfect lover or the perfect wanton (according to one's understanding) until she grew to find it matching slowly, insinuatingly, all the brave things her mother had said of it; all the brave things that only an exile *could* say.

An exile: that was what her mother had been, what her mother remained to the last day of her death—a woman born with the thunder of the Atlantic in her ears and condemned to the dry crisp silences of the desert. She had followed a land-hungry husband West—he who, in the end, was beaten by the very patch of ground which he sought to subdue and

capture. A devilish bit of ground that, rimmed in by blunt scarred hills and coaxed to anæmic harvests with the dribbling overflow of a slow brakish stream which somehow managed to survive the consuming heat. . . . Yes, Mildred Bradford had offered everything upon the altar of this adventure; everything but her child. It was as if she had set her teeth grimly together and shaken her fist in the face of the desert which she hated so passionately and said:

"You shall never possess my child—*never!*"

And so from the first she had crooned softly to the nursling at her breast, songs of the sea, "I saw three ships a-sailing, a-sailing o'er the sea"—these were the first words that Jane ever remembered hearing in a land of powdered dust and panting lizards and still clear noons.

Then later had come the stories—tales of the sea, pictures of the fishing village of Gloucester where her mother had been born. Gray misty pictures; steel-blue, white-capped pictures; green-gold, sunlit pictures . . . drenched, drenched in moisture . . . cool to listen to. And finally the day when, in a package, had come from home two curious things—a ship's model and a conch shell. . . . "I saw three ships a-sailing!" In a flash this picture ceased to be an abstraction.

As for the conch shell, Jane Bradford had held it to her ear while her mother had said:

"Listen! . . . There! Now you have heard the sea!"

It had been mysterious, this moment; and solemn—almost like a confirmation. It delivered Jane Bradford, somehow, from the sunburnt thrall of the desert and sealed her forever to the sea!

Yes, from that moment all Jane Bradford's dreams had the sea for a background with the gallant ship *Ariel* as her fetish and the conch shell an oracle filled with incomprehensible voices.

He met her the next day at the school-house and walked home with her, swinging his walking-stick vigorously. He carried an enormous orange-colored box with a procession of Chinese figures waving banners on it. For a town like Mesquite nothing could have been more diverting. At her doorstep he said:

"Aren't you going to give me my daily tea?"

"Yes, after you've told me your name."

"Cyril," he answered dryly.

His reticence annoyed her but she kept her temper. "Cyril!" she repeated, with a little inflection of sarcasm. "You must be a duke or something."

"*Must* is a terribly unpleasant word," he flung back.

She replied by unlocking the door and waving him in; he handed her the orange-colored box. "It's one of those rubbishy studio dolls that I picked up in San Francisco when I was *doing* all the antique shops. . . . Of course I've no use for it."

"Is that why you brought it to me?" she asked, wondering at the sharp quality of her insolence as she tossed the box unopened upon a couch.

He gave her a tolerant smile which immediately put her at a disadvantage. She took refuge in her preparations for tea. He leaned back, stretching his legs out languorously, and she could see that his lazy glance was fixed on nothing save the good ship *Ariel*. She brought in the tea and rattled the cups to recall him. Really, she thought, for anyone who wore spats and was named Cyril his manners were extraordinarily bad. He revived languidly and she served him a severe note of disapproval, hardening her upper lip. But he was quite oblivious.

She left her own cup to cool and went to the orange-colored box, snapping the cord which secured its lid.

"I hope you understand," she said disagreeably, "that my decision about the *Ariel* is final. . . . I shall *never* sell it to *anybody!*"

He made no reply. . . . She thrust her hands into the box and dragged out a lean, spineless rag doll with a vacuous face that somehow contrived to look disparagingly human. She gave it an impatient shake and literally flung it into a nearby chair. It sat up, leering at her.

"You didn't suppose," she exclaimed, "that you could bribe me with a thing like that!"

"Beware of Greeks bearing gifts: is that it?"

"If you want to put it that way."

He turned two eyes mild with reproach upon her. "That's a very ungracious speech for such a charming young lady."

He kept on, for an entire week, drinking her tea and carrying gifts to her: fat Chinese gods, a Russian icon of beaten silver, a fan that had once been the property of the Empress Carlotta . . . every strange thing, in short, which he had acquired in his quest of the *Ariel.* It was the fan that did the most to unsettle her: old ivory and lace with courtly figures painted on it. When she opened it a haunting perfume would fill the air, evoking dreams. This had been the bauble of a lovely woman and her personality still clung to it. . . . Upon the faded trappings of Jane Bradford's habitation these alien toys fell like jeweled beetles upon a dusty leafage. They were like a carnival troup in flight, resting at a drab wayside inn. And the capacity within her that made sentinels of the cottonwoods, and filled the *Ariel's* empty sails, and gave an authentic voice to the conch shell, animating them with eerie life, welcomed them.

Sometimes as she sat opposite him, dropping the required lumps of sugar into his tea, she felt the whole incident of

his coming and his presence to be a brittle dream that the slightest jar would shatter. She knew the neighbors were wondering about him, laughing at his ridiculous walking-stick and spats, but she had a way of deflecting their inquiries which they would scarcely have forgiven in another. The daughter of Mildred Bradford was bound to be queer, and so they accepted her with indulgence. But even if she had lacked reticence, how could she have answered them? Could she have told the inhabitants of Mesquite, "His name is Cyril, and he has come all the way from Cornwall to gain my model of the good ship *Ariel?*" Fancy how they would have received such a statement! It sounded outrageous even to her, committed as she was to phantasy.

But at other times there was a thin reality about him, softened by pathos which brought a little catch in her throat. "So I run about the world collecting toys." A thwarted desire lay back of this admission in spite of the air of inconsequence with which he carried it off. One day he caught a look of half interrogation, half pity which she had thrown at him and he tossed it back with the quiet mirth in his eyes. She flushed.

"I suppose," he drawled, "that my sort is new to you."

"*Your* sort!" she could only echo in her embarrassment.

"Yes—a man who collects things."

She met his gaze clearly now. "Not exactly. There's a cowpuncher over by Windgate who has a room full of rattlesnake skins. They say he'll ride a hundred miles to pick up a new one. I remember when I was a child he dropped in on us at noon one day and stayed to dinner. There was a rattlesnake skin that my father intended working into a belt drying on the wall. When he left, the skin was gone. He could have had it for the asking, but I guess

he was afraid to risk it. I can recall how my father laughed."

He let the glinting light in his eyes smoulder. "You understand then that a man who collects things has no conscience . . . he stops at nothing."

She faced him squarely. "What you mean is that if worst came to worst, you could steal the *Ariel*."

He nodded. "Oh, very much sooner than that." He came suddenly to his feet and in an instant he was standing before her with the ship model in his profane hands.

A chill ran over her. "You wouldn't do that," she heard herself saying reproachfully.

He laughed and set the *Ariel* back. "Not until I've asked for it, at any rate. I shall be much more sporting than your cowpuncher. . . . Besides, it won't be necessary."

"Ah, you think I'm generous!" was all she could say in reply.

"Better than that! I think you're kind."

"I'm not," she said stubbornly. "It's ridiculous, your wanting it at all. You must have dozens of ship models."

"A hundred anyway," he cut in quietly.

"A hundred, then! While I've just got one."

"That's what makes it absurd. . . . Just one of anything is so stupid!"

His threat to steal the *Ariel* put a keen edge on the situation. She felt like a princess in a fairy tale with a magical possession to guard. And the two darkly green poplars before her door became more and more the sentinels she had fancied them, only now they were enchanted. But try as she would, she could not make a sinister figure of a male in tweeds and spats, carrying a cane, and drinking tea with her. And yet she felt him quite capable of turning thief,

almost more capable than a cowpuncher with a flair for rattlers' skins.

A man who could travel clear from Marseilles, France, to Mesquite, Nevada, in quest of his object would scarcely be balked by thin scruples. . . . She could have dealt with a cowpuncher who stole from her in a cowpuncher's way: or, more properly, she could have turned him over to the community for chastisement, which held every possibility of an unpleasant and irrevocable dangling from a convenient tree. But there was something too grotesque and out-of-the-picture about a lynching party with Cyril as the objective. No, it would be impossible to deal in any such fashion with a man who ran about the world collecting toys: dolls and golden icons and lace fans; who said, "I shall be more sporting than your cowpuncher."

When he came again he had a book for her: *A Hundred Famous Ships' Models.* And remembering his words of the day before she said, "Your collection?"

He laughed. "I should say not. I've not a single example as distinguished as the least of these. But? I shall have *one* as corking—when I carry back the *Ariel.*" He opened the book to the first page. "This," he said, "is an Egyptian tomb model and opposite is the picture of a Viking Ship at Gogstad. . . . Norsemen buried their ships and raised a mound over them. Whalers sprang from this type."

She bent over the huge book, fascinated. He described the solid oak planking of the viking ships, and the square-sail of flax and the dragon's head at the bow. These were the ships (he explained to her) with tents stretched on deck for sleeping quarters, in which the Scandinavians voyaged to pillage Great Britain, Iceland, France, and even North America.

"Great vultures seeking spoils," he said.

She shook her head and her glance traveled through the open door far beyond the hills that hemmed the Saltine Valley.

"No," she protested, "they're more like eagles to me—free like eagles!"

He kept his glance questioningly upon her. "Like eagles liberating a race?"

"Yes—how did you guess?"

Later came models with platforms raised for the archers. Her eyes glistened. "The beginning of navies!" she cried, clapping her hands.

"How quickly you see things!" he commented in swift admiration. "Now we've come to the point where trade is born. These ships belonged to the Hanseatic League. They carried furs from Russia: ermine and sable for kings' cloaks. And copper from Sweden and woven cloth from England."

There followed bulky galleons which had fathered modern battleships, and in their wake the famous *Henry Grace à Dieu* launched in 1514.

"Henry Grace à Dieu!" she echoed, midway between interrogation and pleasure in just the sound of the name.

"Gorgeous, isn't it? . . . Built specially to bear Henry VIII from Dover to meet Francis I upon the Field of the Cloth of Gold. . . . And here is a model of Drake's *Golden Hind*. And no end of Venetian traders. Can you imagine the treasure they carried back to Italy? . . . And here—"

She put her hand on his as he turned the next page. "Let's stop right there," she said, "at *Henry Grace à Dieu* and *The Golden Hind* and the 'Venetian traders.'"

She felt the fleeting pressure of his cool white fingers. "They *do* stir up beauty in a person, don't they? . . . But we're only halfway through. There is still Mr. Pepys' *Loyal*

London and Lord Nelson's *Victory* and the Chinese tea-clippers."

"Let's save them until to-morrow," she pleaded.

He turned the pages back to the *Henry Grace à Dieu.* "Do you know," he said, looking at her intently, "that's the first time you ever asked me to come back."

Without answering she looked down at the stately outline of the *Henry Grace à Dieu.* If she had spoken she would have said, "But I expected you." And in the flush of this realization her silence became prolonged.

The next afternoon when they had finished with Mr. Pepys' *Loyal London* and Lord Nelson's *Victory* and the Chinese tea-clippers she closed the huge book gently and she said:

"And, now, what about *your* models—the hundred or more that *you* own?"

He gave a deprecating laugh. "I told you yesterday they're not a patch on any of these. Simple church models and the like. Poor things but my own."

"Church models?" she echoed.

"Yes, models hung in the churches for God's favor and blessing. You'll find them in all the French fishing villages. They make a model of their seagoing craft and hang it from the church rafters. . . . It's a quaint custom."

She laid the book aside. "I think I should like your collection best," she said gravely.

His eyes smiled back at her. "Yes, I think you would."

"And if," she went on soberly, "I ever were to part with the *Ariel* I should like to think of it there—among the church models."

"Oh, I've plenty of profane types," he laughed. "They're not all such pious examples."

"It isn't that," she answered, "but the *Ariel* wouldn't shine in all that grand crowd." She pointed to the closed book. "It's a humble thing and it's always been in humble company."

He shook his head. "You're wrong. It belongs with the best. And in the end it will find it's level. As a matter of fact, I shouldn't be able to keep it always . . . it wouldn't be fair. My conscience would reprove me. Oh, I'll hold it captive for a while, as you have. And then one day I'll screw up my courage and place it where it should be—with the *Henry Grace à Dieu* and Mr. Pepys' *Loyal London* and *The Golden Hind.*"

"Hold it captive, as I have!" she found herself repeating slowly.

"Yes, isn't it imprisoned here? . . . You're the only one who really ever sees it."

She stood up. "It's mine, isn't it? Haven't I the right to imprison it?" Her voice rose with helpless vehemence.

"No, no one has the right to imprison a beautiful thing." She had no answer for him and he spoke again, rapidly, pressing home his advantage. "I mean to be fair. It isn't as if I'm asking you to *give* it to me. I'll pay you well for it. Usually I haggle over these things. Not because I'm close-fisted but because it's part of the game; like bringing down a bird in a single shot. But you—I'm going to tell you right off what it's worth: at least a thousand dollars if you want to know. And I'm prepared to pay that much—now, this very minute!"

"A thousand dollars! . . . No, it can't be worth that!"

"It may be worth more."

She went over to the shelf and stood gazing up at her treasure. When she finally spoke her voice was brittle:

"I shall never sell it," she said, *"never!"*

He shrugged his shoulders. "There is only one thing left, then," was his quiet answer.

After he had said good-night she took the *Ariel* down and hid it, not in the least effectively but with a sense of taking due precaution. The room seemed positively empty. Fancy anyone imagining that she would part with it!—a thing bound up with every association of her childhood! . . . No, there was nothing that could take its place—not even the ivory-and-lace fan that once had been the property of the Empress Carlotta. . . . As for the thousand dollars, it was an affront to fancy that she would sell her birthright for such an obvious mess of pottage. . . . And yet, a thousand dollars might liberate her; might be the wings that would carry her over the rim of the blunt scarred hills to freedom; upwards as the meadow lark had been carried on that day when a truant shower had released a brief but violent ecstasy. This thought swept her like a gust, shaking her constancy. She put the conch shell to her ears and its voice was the moist voice of the sea, calling to her. And as she closed her eyes she smelled the lupines among the sand dunes, and heard the curlew's cry, and felt the cool spray against her cheek.

"The sea is a passion with you, isn't it?"

That was almost the first question he had asked her. . . . . Well, he was offering her the sea in terms of a thousand dollars. Offering her the sea. . . . She listened again to the clipt voices that poured into her ears, distant roars, the soft splashing of water among the rocky pools. . . . Offering her something she already possessed—that was the thought which finally steadied her.

She rose and uncovered the *Ariel* again, setting it this time upon the table before her; the book of a hundred ship models

stood open to the *Henry Grace à Dieu.* She would have liked to see it, this *Henry Grace à Dieu,* on the morning when it had weighed anchor at Dover with its courtly passenger list—setting out for the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Swords flashing from jeweled scabbards . . . wimples fluttering in the breeze. . . . Brocades and lace and laughter. . . . perfume and ermine and sunlight. . . . And there was Drake's *Golden Hind* to scan again; and the Venetian traders . . . and Mr. Pepys' *Loyal London* and Lord Nelson's *Victory,* and the Chinese tea-clippers. . . . What processions and pageants and conquests they called up! And opposite them stood the *Ariel,* her *Ariel:* a beautiful example of an English frigate done in 1803 with its enormously interesting spritsail top-gallantsail. A prisoner's model. A political prisoner? . . . a prisoner of the wars? . . . a prisoner of circumstance? . . . A murderer, perhaps—who could say? Releasing beauty; escaping upon the wings of creation to a truant freedom. Yes, it was beautiful, she could see it now. More beautiful than she had ever imagined, and it belonged with the others.

The realization came to her quietly, numbing her almost with its placid inevitably. It didn't belong to her; it never had. . . . She sat all night with that thought and the next day when he tapped upon her door she felt her heart stand still.

He said at once, "This is my last visit . . . I have come to ask you once more: Will you sell the *Ariel* to me?"

She answered him clearly. "No . . . I shall *give* it to you."

He stared at her. "But I must pay you."

"You cannot," she answered simply.

He sat for a moment in deep silence. "There is another thing I want," he said.

She rose with a fluttering fear. "Isn't one wild goose enough to capture?"

"One of anything is so ridiculous."

She could feel her lips harden. "My conch shell? No, you can't have that!"

He shook his head. "Can't you guess? . . . *You!*"

It was her turn to stare and yet she was not even frightened. She did not know his name . . . she did not know his fortune . . . she did not know his temper . . . but she knew her answer.

"I've a place in Cornwall—the sea laps it for miles and miles. And there is a castle on a cliff within sound and smell of it. . . ."

"A castle on a cliff," she heard herself echoing. "Then you are a—"

"Duke or something? . . . Does it matter?"

"No, it doesn't matter in the least," she answered.

WHEN HELL FROZE

By

Wilbur Daniel Steele

IT WAS the biggest farm on the Footstool: it had smooth swelling fields, like waves; well-tended woodlots, and clean fat cattle. Addie Joslin was part of it. The strength of her eighteen years of married life had gone into it; season by season she had served its needs, spending much on the land and little on herself.

The only really hard time was the week in the fall when her husband was away in New York on his year's business, and especially now that he was taking Ray with him. But it was time their firstborn should be learning those other things, remote, but apparently as essential to the growth and well-being of the soil as the things that lay in her knowledge —tillage, drainage, and manure. And after all, no matter how long a week may seem on double and treble duty, it is only seven days.

She had the church, the grange, the Daughters of the Morning Star; she had her diversions if she cared to take them. This she seldom did. Her life had little in it that was separate from the farm. Even Frankie, the four-year-old, her baby, was not separate; little that was not of her or of the fields or cattle was in him. He was made of her and the earth, and she was made of the earth.

She was slow of speech and reason, a slow woman. This was because she saw all things moving in unalterable sequence. Seed, sprout, full stalk, threshed grain—as simply

as that unfolded all the thoughts she needed. So her hair stayed brown and there were no wrinkles about her eyes.

This evening she was a little tired. But to-night John and Ray would be home; perhaps in time for the milking. The week was all but done.

A little tired, yes. When she had started the cows up from the lower pasture, instead of following at once she rested her weight on the fence in the shriveled shadow of an aspen and stood dreaming up the land, her eyes moving slowly from field to higher field, reaped and brown.

It all did look pretty, with the sun setting behind the mountain.

It had done well this year; well.

Would they be home in time for the milking? First there was Heather to be milked, then Sally, then Dapple, then Princess, then Snow. She must be getting lazy, she guessed. She had better be starting her boots.

But now there was a sound of music. It was strange to hear music down here. Forgetting the cows for another moment she turned to look. There was a path beyond the fence, leading up from southwest of the mountain, and a man came along it playing a harmonica. He was tall, red-headed, and lank; under one elbow he gripped a pack while with the other he beat time, a perfect vagabond. Observing Addie he halted and took off his hat.

"How d'you do? Good evening."

Not being much with strangers Addie kept her mouth shut, nodded slightly, and looked beyond him at the ridges, powdered pink with sunset. The man came and got up to sit on the fence. He played softly a few more bars. Addie turned to go. He whacked the instrument on his thigh and said: "Excuse me, but do you know a town called Twinshead up this way, lady?"

"Yes." She stopped and eyed him. "I ought to, I was raised there."

"You was? Know a man named House there? Garage man?"

"I ought to, he's my brother-in-law."

"Well, I swear! He's the man I was figuring to work for."

"He is? Well, he's my brother-in-law."

"How far would you call it from here?"

"Over down in the next valley. Around six mile."

"Six mile, eh? Some step! Listen; any place around here a man could get a shakedown for the night, lady? I'm not much chopping wood, but if you got any Lord's kind of a gas-engine wants tinkering . . ."

"Well, if my husband gets home as I'm expecting them, there's the seedan's been knocking lately. Though I don't know certain he'll come. But then if he don't there's Hurlbut's, a half mile on down."

He got over the fence. "Well, what do you say we see?"

He came along a little at the trail, busy again with his tunes, as, climbing and clucking, she got the cattle through the successive gates. When they had come up into the last lane she said: "You play pretty. Although I must say I don't know those tunes."

"Latest things. I don't suppose they're up this way yet."

"I don't know. I'm not much on town. When I was a girl though, in town, I used to know all the songs going."

"I bet. Know this one? *'I thought it was a kiss, but it was just an idle dream.'* Remember?"

"Yes, certainly . . . Frankie!" she called to her child, who, halfway down from the house, had stopped at sight of the stranger. "Come walk with Mama, come!" And as the

boy, pouting, edged a few shy steps nearer: "Yes, certainly, I know that and a lot of others; the 'Merry Widow' and *'Come, come, I love you only,'* and all those."

"It's funny how those old ones stick by you. The ones nowadays—though now and then you'll find one—listen to this."

Cupping the toy in both hands he lifted his brows and drooped his lids. He breathed softly among the reeds. He loved it. When he reached the end he recited the ultimate phrase with the throaty husk of the devotee, watching her eyes for approbation: *"Kiss me, kiss me, aga–i–n . . . "*

She gave her thumb to Frankie.

"What's the matter with *you,* for Heaven's sake?"

"Is he my uncle?" The boy pulled around behind her. She laughed.

"Uncle? Land, no! He's nobody you know."

"What you been givin' him kisses fer then?"

Addie's mouth fell open. "Don't say such things; the idea!" She gave his hand a shake. "I—well,—you don't understand, that's all."

The stranger grinned, his amused eyes going from one to the other.

Frankie persisted. "Did you kiss him fer playin' so nice, Mama?"

The man laughed outright, arms akimbo, head up. "Look-a-here," he cried, bending suddenly and holding the harmonica out on his palm. "What you say to that, sonny? Like play moosic? Well, take that with my regards; that'll keep you busy, won't it now?"

"Oh, he shouldn't," his mother muttered, as the small fingers edged around her skirt. Once he had hold of it the boy was away like an Indian's shadow, through the fence and into the cover of the dogwood hedge beyond.

The man chuckled. "Oh, no, he didn't care for it at all; couldn't find house-room for it, Oh, no!" He shifted his pack and began to whistle.

When Addie came up to the yard after impounding the cows she found the man sitting on the kitchen stoop, still whistling.

"I guess my husband ain't coming to-night after all," she said, looking up and down the darkening road. Entering the house she came out again with some pie and cheese and a cup of milk. "Though I shouldn't feel like turning you away without a snack. Then 'tain't far down to Hurlbut's."

As he sat munching, the man began to study her with a new obliquity.

"How long's your husband away for?"

"He goes a week every fall on business to New York City."

"Aren't you ever kind of lonesome?"

"No time for lonesomeness. I ought to be milking right now."

"Still, up here by yourself, everybody away." He took out a cigarette and lit it. "Eh? Don't you ever wish—well—there was some man around the place, nights?"

Addie shook her head. "There's nothing to harm a body up this way."

The man shook his. "I give it up." He wiped his mouth and got to his feet. "Then I guess I'll be on my way. Now I've had supper, thanks to your kindness, I guess I might's well go on through. Is it around this way out?"

She showed him, walking down as far as the gate.

"Still," he mused, "the men have all the fun, don't they. I suppose your hubby always tells you everything he does while he's in New York?"

"I don't see what you mean. If you mean he carries on, then you don't know John A. Joslin. And moreover, he's got Ray along; that's our oldest."

"How old?"

"Going on seventeen. But he's big for his age."

The man slapped his thigh. "I bet!"

"Well," he said, when he was done chuckling, "I suppose if you're dead certain you're not going to want protecting to-night—I might's well be on my way. Thanks very much for the bite, and if you're ever in Twinshead this winter, look me up . . . Good night."

For another moment Addie leaned there watching him off into the dusk.

What was all that talk of his? Who was he? Where had he come from? From as near as the nearest town? From as far as China? A strange irresponsible fellow riding his legs across the mountains, whistling across the world.

"I want my supper." It was Frankie at her elbow, whining.

"Heavens and Earth, what am I thinking of! Those poor cows!"

The men came that night after all, when the chores were done and Frankie in bed. Hearing the car turn into the yard, Addie put a piece of meat in the spider and began cutting up some cold potatoes to brown, so that by the time they came in their supper was half ready.

It always gave her a queer turn for a moment when they arrived, like two strangers with their good clothes and their suitcases, and the way, for the first instant, they looked around, as if it were a new hotel. She would have been glad if it could have lasted longer. That was why she had hurried to get things under way and their chairs drawn up to the table.

"If you'll set right down your supper'll be on in no time."

"Well, no." Her husband gave her a kiss on a cheek-bone—one of the year's two—and adding, "Might's well be comfortable," passed on upstairs.

She wondered if Ray would kiss her too this year. But just as he was on the point of it he remembered something more important.

"Oh, Ma, d'you know what? We bought you a present to bring home, a couple of nice aprons, and then what'd we go and do but leave 'em in the train. Wasn't that a bright one?" And he too went upstairs.

Above the sputter of the frying meat she could hear their voices, Ray's mostly, fragmentary and muffled. Once Ray laughed. He came down in his corduroys and brown sweater, and in pulling off his shirt he had spoiled his hair. His father was in his nightshirt, over which he had drawn a pair of overalls. They might neither of them have been away.

They ate in silence, chewing like tired men, their elbows guarding their plates and their eyes centered in the flame of the lamp between them. They seemed to be dreaming. Once Ray chuckled, his eyes passing to his father. The old man cast him a dour look. "You calm down."

Addie opened some pears. "Everything all right in the city?" she inquired as she helped them. Joslin nodded at the lamp, protruding his lower lip. "I'd say so, yes, all right. . . ."

She went and got the new *Sentinel.* Joslin wiped his mouth, opened the paper, cast an eye over the deaths, and yawned.

"Frankie all right?" he asked by and by.

"Yes, Frankie's all right."

"Stock all right?"

"Yes, all right. Except a funny thing about Snow's calf—"

"What's wrong with Snow's calf?"

"Nothing, only the way she acts about the red rooster. It was the day you left—" Addie drew up a chair and put her elbows on the table. "No, it was the day *after* you left, I guess; yes, Wednesday morning—"

Joslin's lids drooped. His chin was sinking into his neck. He straightened up when Addie's voice stopped, and muttered: "Been a hard day."

"Been a hard week," Ray added facetiously, staring at the lamp.

His father got to his feet. "You be up and down by four sharp, son, that's all." He took a match and went upstairs. Ray leaned back and began to play a harmonica. It was "The Sidewalks of New York."

"Where'd this thing come from?" he demanded, stopping in the middle of a bar. "I had one like it, but it was an 'A'."

"It's Frankie's." Addie began to scrape the plates.

"Where'd he get it?"

She didn't feel like talking any more; all that explanation. So she said: "Somebody or other give it to him, I guess."

Ordinarily she would have washed the dishes, but this was the night her husband had come home, so she stacked them and, asking Ray to put out the light when he came she went upstairs, taking off her apron. Just before she reached their bedroom she had a start. Then she could have smiled, for it was only Frankie, out of bed, half awake, in the dark hall.

He resisted her hand. "I wan' my thing; ut's mine."

"What thing? You're dreaming. Go back to bed."

"Who's 'at uts got ut, playin'?"

"Playing what? Oh, I see, yes, your ——"

"My moosic thing, ut 'at man gin me, ut you kissed."

"Shhh!" Addie stood back on her heels. "Hush your mouth!" It was absurd but she felt helpless.

Frankie turned sullen. "No, but I wan' ut; ut's mine."

"Yes, all right, yes. You be still and run back to bed like a good boy, and I'll go straight and get it for you." She returned below stairs.

"Ray, gi'me that. Your brother's woke up fretting, and it's his."

The child was waiting at the top. She led him back and tucked him in.

"Here it is, Frankie, but listen, you shouldn't say that about that man. It's bad—naughty, because I never did. Now go bye-bye and forget it."

Smoothing his hair she left him. At the door, however, she vacillated. It was so laughable, yet it made her feel so helpless. She was used to dealing with things that had some logic in them. It exasperated her.

Returning to the bedside she got down and put her lips to his ear.

"If ever you say that again about my such a thing as kissing that or any other man, I'll spank you. I'll take down your panties and spank you with the hairbrush, hard; you hear?"

Then she went to their room. The lamp was turned low. Her husband was in bed, asleep.

Well, he'd had a hard day, this traveling. He'd had a hard week.

She undressed and blew out the light, and, going to the window, stood there a while. The moon was up, sailing in a cloudless sky; under it the farm lay, sloping away; gently

swelling smooth fields in the pale light, like pale breasts on the mountain, against the black hem of the woods below.

Her thoughts were in two layers. In the top layer there were these: now they've come home we can get the manure started out on the west plowing and we can decide if we'll change it to rye; we can weed out the pullets, and we can get to work and ditch the waste piece before it freezes.

In the bottom layer, the buried one, was this: They are not part of it, as I am; I am part of it and it is part of me. The deep reason for her being, the long, habitual, fruitful identity with the soil and its creatures, filled her unconscious thoughts. Who, to this dark Amazonian tenant of her soul, were those two men of whom she was a little awed; those two who went away and had a time, and left her alone at last with the autumnal land, at rest after the summer's travail, at peace for a little while? They owned the farm. Yes, but it was hers. . . .

What she was thinking as she crept under the blankets beside the sleeper was: "I wonder what color aprons they were." . . .

The men were cutting out brush in the waste piece, preparatory to ditching. It was the day which last night had presaged—perfect autumn, chill in the shadows, glassy clear. The mountain stood solid and separate; the sky, no longer weighing on the horizons, showed itself detached and whole, going on around. Beast and fowl made themselves heard, sounds reiterant, monotonous and good, bawling of young cattle, ruffle and cut-cut of hens, pigs grunting, and Frankie marching to his harmonica, a suck and a blow, a suck and a blow, soul-satisfying, around the barn, around the orchard, around the sheds.

"Mama, kin I go down see Ray yet?"

"Not yet, you'll be in the way; run try and find Speck's nest."

Another circuit. "Mama, kin I go yet?"

"Not yet."

Even the apples Addie was sorting seemed to fall in with the cosmic rhythm: a cider, a cider, a cider, an eating, a pie. Under her breath, inattentively, she hummed fragments of old tunes. *"I thought it was a kiss, but it was just an idle dream."* For her and for the farm it was the beginning of another year.

Clear reddening sunlight. Cut-cut! Mooo-ugh! A loudening harmonica.

"Mama, kin I go down see Ray yet?"

"Yes, pester you, run along; I'll be down in a second for the cows."

Joslin was just coming up as she entered the lane, an axe over his shoulder and his one remaining forelock plastered on his brow. He was a lean wiry man, a hard worker, as faithful a worker as there was.

"Where's Ray?" she asked. He told her Ray was coming along. "Stopped a minute to set down. Trot Frankie. Hurry him up and hurry up them cows."

Crossing the upper pasture she heard music. It came from the brush in the corner of the waste piece, and it was "The Sidewalks of New York." In the midst of it there arose a disturbance. Howls. Yowls of young rage. Words exchanged, high, low, unintelligible at that distance. Addie halted in the bare field. She felt distracted. It was that sudden rent in the fabric of the day; the break in the smooth great throb of all creation.

She fingered her cheeks. "I'll show 'em!" She started that way. Before she had gone far the squabble had quieted and her older son, pushing out of the thicket, climbed over

the fence twenty yards away. At sight of her he fetched up, his head ducked a little and his mouth half open.

"Where's your brother?" she demanded with a hint of sharpness.

No answer. Ray looked queer. He looked fascinated, embarrassed, and sullen, and his face was turning a mottled red. He was large for his age and hardly knew how to handle himself.

Addie's feeling of distraction deepened.

"What's ailing you? Why don't you answer me?"

Ray closed his mouth, opened it, closed it again. Turning at right angles he started walking heavily and swiftly.

Frankie had appeared now, harmonica in hand. He too stopped short at sight of his mother. Then with a gulp of terror he scuttled back through the fence. She called after him into the brush: "Frankie, you come straight here!" The whole thing shamed and scared her in an unaccountable way; there was nothing to get hold of, no beginning, no why, no wherefore.

Lowering her eyes and pretending to think of something more important than naughty children, she turned back toward the lower lane. At the bars she couldn't help peeping. On the stony profile of the pasture Ray had stopped to watch her, a hulking, sulking silhouette; Frankie, sneaking out of the waste piece farther down, was scuttling up the hill to join him.

But why? But why?

As she brought the cows up in the gathering dusk her feet felt heavy. Nothing any longer kept time; the animals' hoofs clattered on the stones till the wooden jangle got on her nerves and she picked up a stick and drove them.

"Frankie wouldn't come to me; he ran and went with Ray. Why? Why?"

She tried to throw it off at supper, talking more than her habit and laughing at nothing, so that Joslin began to study her, a little puzzled. But it wouldn't work. Ray wouldn't look at her. Chewing to himself he kept his eyes on his plate, his face sallow and dark red by turns. And Frankie lay as low as a mouse in a corner, an uneasy good little boy.

After his dessert Ray went upstairs. When his father had gone to the barn he came down in his serge suit and began hunting for his hat. Addie stood watching him. For the first time in her life she wanted to scream.

"Where you aiming to go to?"

He had his hat in his hand and the door open, his back to her.

"Down to the store, see some life; that's where I'm going to."

"Did your Pa say so?"

"What diff's that make to me?" He spit out on the stoop. Then as though that act had fortified him: "What the hell's it to me? If he says anything you can fight it out with him; it's up to you, see? It's up to you!"

Was he turning crazy? Was the boy sick? When Addie tried to get her mind to think she began to grow frightened. Frightened of what?

She went at her dishes. Joslin came in by and by.

"Was that Ray I see going out? Where's he think he's going to?"

"Well, I wanted a spool of cotton down to the store."

"Cotton! Cotton, eh? And him having to be up and down at four!"

Where was Frankie? Addie went upstairs. She found the boy in bed. Gone of his own accord, undressed without

a whine, and fast asleep. When she had been standing there a moment she saw he wasn't asleep at all.

"Please, please," he wailed of a sudden, "please don' spank me wuth no hairbrush!" He pulled the sheet over his head. "I never said ut, honest; I never tol' Ray ut; I never says you kissed 'at man; I never, I never!"

He screeched. But she was only sitting down, weak as water.

So that was the secret. She felt like laughing. Poor Ray! Poor mixed-up fellow, hurt and scared and scandalized! No wonder! Yet what a relief it was to know the why and the wherefore!

She couldn't spank the child; that was too much to ask of her. Giving him a pat and a tuck she returned to the kitchen to wait for Ray. She could almost see his face when she should tell him.

She sat with her hands in her lap and waited. Half hypnotized by the still flame of the lamp she thought and thought. She remembered Ray as a baby; then as a little boy of Frankie's age following her around; then his going away with his father last year on the trip. She hadn't realized till now that from that trip he had never come back. Nor ever would. She remembered him standing there to-night, spitting out, then swearing in a new angry audacious bass. She began again to have that feeling of helplessness. Little by little it crept and claimed her; why, she couldn't say.

Ray was in and had the door closed before she saw him. Studying his narrowed, bloodshot eyes she got up with a sudden misgiving.

"Come here, le'me smell your breath; you gone and been to Hearn's."

He rubbed a sleeve over his mouth and made for the stairs.

"Ray! Wait!"

Oh, she had never been afraid of anything—of tramps, of bulls, not even of death. But it was this helplessness.

"Wait!" she cried in her deep panic. "You listen to me, I know what's ailing you, don't you think I don't!"

He paused on the stair, glowering back. "I betcha."

"Well, you been listening to your brother, I know that, and I know just precisely what he's been feeding you."

"I betcha do." He went on upstairs and slammed his door.

Well, he wasn't himself. Addie sat down on the nearest chair.

Well, she would tell him in the morning.

She didn't tell him in the morning. How to bring it up; how to begin? She was so slow. Nor in the afternoon. She began to find she couldn't get near him except when his father was there. Well, why not with his father there? She was so confused, so helpless about it—so worn out by it—well, why rake Joslin in?

Time grew. It grew from hours to days. Five of them.

"What's ailing Ray?" her husband asked her. "He eats light and he goes around like he's swallowed a pill. Suppose he's coming down with something?"

If only she could have said then, matter-of-fact: "Well, he's got it into his head from something his brother said that a man that was here while you were away, that I kissed him—" But just there something in her rebelled.

"I don't know," was all she could say.

Another time: "I'm getting uneasy about that boy. Couple times to-day I caught him looking like he wanted to murder somebody. What's ailing him?"

"I don't know."

That was true. What did she know any longer about that

brooding fellow, that averter and avoider, stranger than the strangest stranger? What did she know about anything? It used to be you plant a seed and reap a crop; you commit a crime and go to prison. Now she had done nothing, yet here she stood from day to day and held her breath. Every time Ray looked at his father, every time Frankie so much as passed his father, blowing that infernal toy, she held her breath.

Yet after all it wasn't to come directly from either Frankie or Ray.

Addie was sorting the last of the apples one afternoon. Joslin had been to the store. She heard the car return and a moment later he came into the shed. He sat down and began to eat an apple, a thing he never did; after a bite or so he threw it on the ground and rushed out, only to return, his face contorted and his eyes narrowed. He stood with arms folded.

"Wife, what's all this talk I hear down to the Crossing?"

"Who?"

"I want you should tell me what you got to tell me, plain out."

His voice was obstructed. He spoke slowly, evidently determined to get to the bottom of this thing in a cold-blooded, judicial way. It was worse than any rage. It took all Addie's wits out of her.

"Wh-why, I don't know wh-wh-what—wh-wh-what talk?"

All right. He had done his part, given her her chance, fulfilled his obligations as a reasoning man. Let unreason have its way.

"Who was he? You tell me that, or goll-damn it!" Then he gave her no time. Pointing a fist at her he lifted his lip, showing the points of his teeth. "I want you to tell

me, wife; how long was he here with you, on my farm?" All of his teeth became visible, brown at the bases. "I want you to tell me; what else did you give him besides your kisses?"

Addie wouldn't have known him; he wouldn't have known himself. Wheeling, he walked out of the shed and around the corner of the barn.

No one could blame him. It's terrible enough to ferret such things out in the home: but to get the first inkling at second-hand outside—common property, common gossip bandied over a counter or around a stove!

Addie nailed up the last box of the "Selected." She walked across the yard. Frankie came out of the kitchen door with doughnut crumbs on his cheek and, seeing her, began to play furiously on his rusting instrument. She took it and threw it on the steps and stamped on it. The child opened his mouth; presently the howl came out. Still knowing as little what she did, Addie grabbed him, sat down, held him in her lap, and patted his arm.

"There, there; but now see what you gone and done."

Ray came across the yard. She turned her voice on him.

"Now see what you done. Hearkening to foolishness; running to the store and gabbing lies. Now see what you gone and done."

"What *I* done!" Ray sunk his head between his shoulders. "*I* done! That's a good one, that is." He spit to his left and went on in.

The first half of supper passed in silence; it took all that time for Addie to get her words in order. She got up and stood by the sink.

"Listen, the whole lot of you's just going on something Frankie took into his head, and I should think it had come to a pass when you'll swallow for gospel what a baby his

age says, and won't even hark to a grown woman you've lived with going on nineteen year."

Joslin raised his eyes for the first time. He looked lined and gray.

"That's just the damn part of it. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklin's". He leaned heavily on his elbows and drummed with a knife. "For instance; if I and Frankie there, we'd been to town, and you was to ask me who I'd seen, and I says nobody, and he was to chirp in, 'Oh, no, papa, I guess you're forgetting that woman in the red hat you followed out back of the church shed and put your arm around her'—which 'd you take for the gospel, Addie?"

Addie turned and screamed at Frankie: "Tell 'em the truth! Tell 'em everything happened! Go on tell 'em every last thing you seen!"

Joslin pointed the knife. "Yes, Frankie, now, everything. Mind now, *everything!* Or else, you know, you could go be put in prison."

The child looked at his mother, then at his father, then at his brother; and his brother too was scowling at him in the same silent, awful way. He began to quaver: "I don' want 'at ol' mouf-organ—I never—I never—" and then he was under the table in a heap of fright and woe.

Joslin looked at his plate. He pushed it away from him and got up.

"It tastes dirty." He took his hat and went out. Ray followed.

If Addie could have seen anything she might have been able to see red. But for a while she saw nothing. She stood at the window that night looking out; there was no moon and the stars were clouded and she couldn't even see the farm. Joslin's farm. "How long was he here with you, on *my* farm?" Was the reason she couldn't see it from the

window that, in the super-human violence of his anger, he had torn it up and taken it away?

Her mind had been knocked down; it lay stunned and subservient to the beliefs of others. What was this sin she had committed? How had she, Addie Shoemaker, ever come to do it?

Addie Shoemaker! As she crept in between the blankets, chill with emptiness, the one thing she knew was nostalgia. The house had grown frightening in its silence, hung there over the mountain void from which the farm had been torn away in a shamed man's wrath. If she could only have heard Mama Shoemaker's voice downstairs, reading the *Sentinel,* or Papa Shoemaker's horses stamping in the livery stable out back.

Joslin slept with his son. Addie, coming down half-drugged with a snatch of sleep, found they had got their own breakfast and were gone about their business. She heard their axes across in the waste piece when she took the cows down.

The forenoon grew. With each hour that passed she sank deeper and deeper into the lethargy of the lost. Habit worked her hands. She got a good dinner—home sausage, mashed potatoes, stewed tomatoes, squash pie, baking-powder biscuit last. It was ready to the minute. She let Frankie ring the bell.

Ray was in the yard but he didn't come. Then she remembered Joslin had gone off in the car at eleven. He was returning just now. They came in together, the father carrying two paper bags and a can.

"Well, dinner's on." She fastened Frankie's bib and sat down.

The men went to the sink. Joslin opened his can of pork and beans. In one bag there were crackers, in the other

cup-cakes. Standing there by the drainboard they made their meal.

Addie sat and stared. There was something about this act that took away what little she had left of her powers. Her husband's face fascinated her. Under its stubble the skin looked hot and dry. But never a word.

Ray wasn't the man his father was. His mouth full of cracker paste, he couldn't keep his eyes from slipping to the fleshpots on the table. Caught by his mother he reddened and lost his poise. "Taste dirty, 'twould."

His father gave him a look to slay him. "Hush your mouth!"

Then Joslin hushed his own; he stopped chewing. He stared at the pump. He had suddenly envisoned the years to come. His mouth still full, he went outdoors, to return presently with a peach-butter can he had found in the dump. Bringing from the pantry a jar of concentrated lye he emptied it into the can, which he then proceeded to fill from the pump. All his movements were deliberate. He turned to his wife.

"See this? This is lye-water. Well, if so be you want to go on cooking for this family, come wash your hands."

"Come—what?"

"Come wash your hands."

Addie didn't "see red," she saw white. Where the other blow had stunned her mind, this cleared it. Clear as zero ice. Her voice sounded flat.

"You say you want I should wash my hands in that?"

Joslin inclined his head. Her eyes left his and played over the table, resting for a moment on the heavy castor, for another on the broad blade of the meatknife. Strange, rushing impulses. Fearful speculations. Lusts.

She heard her husband's voice: "Here 'tis; I'll leave it here."

"You can leave it there till hell freezes over."

Frankie gasped at the word. Joslin went to the door. "If it takes that long, so be it, wife."

When he and Ray were gone she got Frankie from his chair. She couldn't keep her hands from shaking. She pushed him out of the door, away from her. "Go with 'em! Catch 'em! Stay with 'em! Play down there!"

She put the knife away in the drawer. Then she scraped the untouched plates, carried the food out to the sows, and watched them swill it.

She went to her room and lay down. She remained there staring at the ceiling till she was exhausted with the muscular strain of rigidity, then she got up and prepared supper. She worked all around the peach-butter can but did not disturb it. She set the table with cold meat, potato chips, pickled beets, raspberry sauce, cookies, pie, doughnuts, cheese, and put the kettle on for tea. Into the kettle she stuck her thumb.

Frankie was eating all alone when she came in after milking and the others had gone to the store. She took all the food to the sows, put Frankie to bed, and went to bed herself after bolting the door. Once in the night a terrible loneliness came over her. She went on tiptoe and got Frankie. Almost as soon as she had him in bed, however, she began to shake all over again with the murderous license of her thoughts, and returned him to his room. When she awoke in the morning it was broad day. What matter?

So it went.

Hitherto, even when the men were away she had been surrounded by, and one with, the multitudinous life of the farm: the fields, the stock, the child. But now she felt so

queerly about Frankie that she grew afraid; and as for the farm, she hated it. It *was* Joslin's farm; it had been his before she came; it believed what he believed and looked at her askance with its hundred kinds of eyes as she went up and down—the foolish town girl, the wicked one.

She was alone on the farm. She hadn't had time yet to think of the outside world. One afternoon, however, two separate parties of her friends drove that way along the road. They didn't stop at the gate, only slowed down, necks craned and eyes slanting back at the house in morbid fascination.

And that evening at dusk when she went for the cows there were three men at the bottom of the pasture. They climbed in as she approached and when she would have turned back and avoided them, one took hold of her arm. Though it wasn't cold they had on overcoats with collars turned up, and their hats pulled down, so she could make nothing of their faces.

It was so fantastic she wasn't actually frightened. When the first one spoke, she said: "You're Albert Pease, from Lower Falls."

"You're mistaken," he growled. "We're more-less strangers this side of the county. But we know Joslin by reputation; we know what he's done with this farm; we know what he stands for in this community; and there's times outsiders can do more'n neighbors can. What we want to say is, this here's always been a God-fearing, law-abiding community, and it ain't going to begin winking at goings-on behind husbands' backs at this late date, nor at homes going to rack and ruin and men interfered with in raising this nation's crops, by no stubborn, unholy, un-Christian goings-on."

The second man broke in. "A word to the wise is sufficient."

The third: "Get along in the home, or get out of it."

When they let her go and went back toward the fence she looked about in a sort of daze. There was a chunk of rock near her feet; picking it up she threw it. It struck one man in the small of the back. With the shock and hurt of it he wheeled and started for her, fists clenched, but the others caught him, expostulating in whispers. He puffed at her: "You—you—we'll get you yet, you—" But then one got a hand over his mouth.

She left the cows and ran home. With every step it grew darker and the footing steeper; her chest ached with the bursting of her lungs. When she came into the kitchen her face was red, her lips white, her hair in strings; she looked drunk; she had it in her mind to scream, scream, scream, and nothing more. Then she didn't. Flopping down on the nearest chair she surveyed the room. Of the supper she had left on the table not even Frankie's portion was touched, and the boy himself hid in shadow halfway up the stairs. Joslin sat against the farther wall with his hands in his lap and his best coat on over his overalls. Ray wore his too, and sat with his hands folded. And in a third chair, with his hands folded, sat the minister.

Addie had never been so embarrassed. She tried to stop panting and she couldn't; her face flamed; she dropped her eyes to the table-legs.

"How d'you do," she mumbled. "please to see you."

"I'm pleased to see you, Sister Joslin, I'm sure. As I was saying" . . .

He was a hard-working fellow, their minister, a lean man on a meager living, a little worried head and a big worried heart.

"As I was saying to Brother Joslin, I just dropped in going by. I often drop in on one or another of my people's homes, just simply without any fuss to kneel down in the family circle for a minute and talk with God, as you'd talk with your neighbor. It seems to me there's no prayer in any great tabernacle with stained glass and gilded steeple so helpful, so curative, nor so acceptable to our Father in Heaven as that." He got up suddenly and straightened his vest. "Might we pray?"

Addie couldn't budge; something held her. Tears burned her eyes. She choked: "I never done a thing—it's all lies, I keep telling you, telling you!" The minister's hand fell on her shoulder, firm and kindly.

"You and God know the truth of that, Sister, surely. But anyway, what about just talking it over with God? That's never harmed a living soul since the world was made. . . . Well, men?" He looked at the others who, appearing sober, impressed, and scared, got down with him by their chairs.

Still Addie couldn't budge. The minister popped up again, darted at the stairs and, catching Frankie with a reassuring chuckle, brought him down and planted him on petrified knees with his elbows in his mother's lap. Then he got back to his place and began: "Oh, God, our Heavenly Father" . . .

Those backs! It was too queer and too awful. Freeing Frankie's elbows she slid to the floor. She didn't kneel, just hunkered there, her arm on the chairseat. The good man's voice, husky with the habit of supplication, filled the room with its immemorial sedative phrases. From beyond it, beyond the walls, came the supplication of the unmilked cows, lowing at the bars. Addie's muscles slackened. Under the influence of the harmonious repetitions her thoughts slackened too, lost focus, and became a hodgepodge.

"In Thine infinite mercy" . . . "Mooo-ugh! Mooo-ugh!" . . . "goings-on behind husbands' backs" . . . "Mooo-ugh!" . . . "Vouchsafe that whichever of us is in darkness" . . . The lamp was smoking. . . . The kettle was singing. . . . Somebody was sobbing. . . . "Mooo-ugh" . . . She had hit him with a chunk of rock. Good! . . . "Father be good to us, we little children that don't know their A-B-C's. Teach us, Oh, Great Teacher" . . . Somebody was sobbing. . . .

Addie lifted her head. Something had happened. What had happened was that a spirit had come into the room. The minister had forgotten in his worriment what he was doing; forgotten his calling, forgotten his husk; his voice had grown strident, insistent: "God, let's wipe it clean; let's look each other in the eye and see the truth and tell it and have the dirty business over with and begin all new again. There, that's right, that's right."

It was Ray sobbing. Frankie blubbered. Addie put her hand on his head. Little Frankie, little baby! And all of them! All gathered around the table again discussing the fields, the smiling fields, the fattening stock. All straight in the loving light of God again; all new.

"Amen."

They got up, all new. Joslin blew his nose. How worn to the bone he looked. It was funny to see his face wet with tears. He walked to the sink, still blowing his nose. He looked at the peach-butter can, still there, still full. Was he going, was he going, Oh, Glory, was he going to dump it out?

"There, yes brother, vengeance is mine saith the Lord, there, there. . . ."

"Mooo-ugh . . . Mooo-ugh." . . .

Joslin didn't dump it. Before they knew what he was

about, there went both his own hands into it, right down to the coat-cuffs.

"There's for anything I may've done ever," he whistled through his teeth as he withdrew the hands, gray with the caustic that dripped on the linoleum. "Son," he said, turning to Ray, "if so be you got anything ——"

The overgrown boy had been through an overgrown hell these weeks. His diaphragm collapsed; he too ducked his hands to the cuffs; he too stood with them streaming. What deliverance! What brightness! Supper to-night!

And Addie was thinking, her eyes blind with water: "Supper to-night!"

"Well, wife?"

Through the blur she saw them watching, waiting. Their eyes went to the peach-butter can and came back to her again. Well, Ma? Well, wife?

While she stood there trying to fathom it the minister came softly and, taking one of Frankie's hands, curled its fingers around her thumb.

"'A little child shall lead them.'"

"Not on your life!"

For an instant after that their faces looked so blank it was comic. Then the heavenly bubble that filled the room was shattered and the air was thick.

"You won't, won't you!" Joslin spread his smarting hands on the table. Ray bawled: "You double-crosser, you!" And Joslin again: *"You won't, eh?"*

"Not till hell freezes over, I won't!"

Before the distracted arm of the minister could catch her she had the door opened, and slammed again behind her as she ran.

She stood panting in the middle of the yard, her knees half bent. A crescent moon in the west threw a phantom

light across the world. She saw the white faces of the cows all staring at her across the bars at the lane, their black mouths all gaping at her. "Mooo-ugh!"

Turning, she fled around the corner of the house and down the path and out the gate and down the road that led to the valley of the Twinskill where she was born. . . .

Winter came and covered the mountain. In the short days the sun shone and there were occasional sounds. The long nights were silent. For a while in the early evening there was a light in the farmhouse on the ridge, but by eight it was gone. In the town of Twinshead, miles away but distinct in the bodiless air, lights burned in clusters till nine and ten and eleven.

November, December, January, February, March.

In late March a snow flurry met a cross wind and fell as rain. Another week and the gulleys were running water. Around the rags of drifts the earth seemed visibly to puff up, reawakened and wishful. One evening when Ray had got a mock of supper huddled together on the table and was about to light the lamp, he looked and blew out the match instead; a shaft of pale magenta standing in at the windows from the west was enough to eat by. Spring had come.

With the coming of spring and the prying of light, the ravages of winter began to show themselves—to the eye, the nose, the cheated palate; even to the ear. When the beasts began to bawl, Frankie, who had been stupid all through the cold like any little animal that hibernates, began too. First to sniffle and then eternally, causelessly, to wail. Threats did no good.

His wailing wasn't the worst. He began to talk about his mother.

"When's my Mama coming home?"

"Hush your face and eat your supper."

"When's my Mama coming home?"

When nothing else served they sent him to bed. But next night as soon as it darkened he was at it again: "When's my Mama coming home?"

His father was a man; he could set his face like frozen leather and sit quiet behind it. But Ray couldn't. His nerves set him on the child.

"Your Mama? You ain't got no Mama, didn't you know that?"

"Ray," said his father, "eat! Think we want to be up all night?"

"Nothing I'd like better." Ray hulked over his plate for a few mouthfuls. But his nerves only got worse. An embittered restlessness pushed him to bravado. "Nothing I'd like better'n staying up all night once. I betcha one thing; I betcha Ma ain't going to bed no half-past seven or eight these nights in Twinshead. Huh-huh! Not Ma."

It kept at him. Doing the dishes later he resumed the attack.

"Not her, no sir! She knows when she's well off, I warrant you. Seeing everybody, tending shop for Aunt Hattie in the hat store, hearing everything going. And Aunt Hattie gives parties, too. Know what I heard to the store? Aunt Hattie give one party that Uncle Albert had every car from his garage lining the sidewalk to take the folks home. Don't you forget it, Pa!"

His father was reading the *Sentinel.*

"I won't forget it," he said in a steady careful voice, "if *you will.*"

Forget it! Ray had planted the wind in his own soul; the whirlwind had him. Parties and cars, bright lights and goings-on. He couldn't sleep for thinking of them; all next

morning was wishful bitterness. Springtime! It was he that ought to be out with the fellows and girls, and looking well, instead of penned in this makeshift life of two-legged pigs. With the afternoon a wild and weakling resolve took form. Well, he didn't care.

He got away; ran away, he didn't care. He went down to the store at the Crossing where there was a telephone booth. He got his aunt's house. His mother was at the hat store. He got the hat store. He didn't care.

"Ma, it's Ray. Ma, you having a good time?"

"Oh, Ray—yes, Ray; how are you, and how's Frankie?"

"He's all right. Ma, you having a nice time down there?"

"How's everything? How's the hay holding out? How's the cows, and have any of 'em come in yet? How are the hens for eggs?"

"All right, yes, O.K.; but you wouldn't fancy it up here, the good time you're having."

"Your Pa still got the lye-can waiting?"

"Ma, listen here, I'll dump it. I will! I will!"

"Your Pa wouldn't like that."

"I'm bigger'n Pa, Ma. I'm stouter'n Pa."

"Where's the use? Maybe you might see me dropping in, though."

"Ma! No! No, honest, Ma! Say, Ma—"

"Maybe it might be soon. Soon's to-night, maybe."

Ray got home breathless, praying his father hadn't yet come in. Luck was with him. For the last time he pawed together the leavings of things for their evening meal. The last time. Last time.

Frankie was at it again. "When's my Mama coming home?"

Ray paled. "Didn't I tell you you hadn't got no Mama?" His breathlessness wouldn't go. He made a saving to-do of

getting his brother to bed, pulling the soiled blankets over him for the last time, for the last time.

His father was reading the *Sentinel;* he had read it seven times through in seven nights. Ray didn't wait to be told, he went at the dishes with a clatter. Puddling in the pan, he hadn't a thing in his mind but one—and that was as big as a mountain. A mountain at his elbow. There it stood, the peach-butter can, still in the same ring of dried slosh on the drain board, still full, each week's loss by evaporation made good with a dipper from the pump, as sure as church.

Hurry! Time was passing; no time to lose. At last he touched it with an accidental thumb. But not yet. He felt blown up like a Fair balloon.

"Pa," he tried at last, his face hot red, "this here can of slop here, it smells. How long we going to keep it, for Goll sake?"

Joslin turned a page and coughed. His bald spot looked sweaty but his voice was dry. "You heard her say herself. Till hell freezes over."

Time was passing. Ray thought once he heard a car in the distance. He looked at his father over his shoulder. "I'm bigger'n him, and stouter."

It was true, and he had never realized it till to-day. His father there was an old man. An old man with stooped shoulders and only a few hairs left, and they white, all in a season. A big bluff. He cleared his throat.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do; I'm going to dump it."

He laid hands on the sacred can. Then he let go, wheeled, and swallowed.

His father was halfway across the floor. He stopped with his feet wide apart and his jaw out. He began swearing in a low voice, words Ray had never heard. His veins stood

out on his temples and his eyes looked crazy. Where was Ray's bulk and muscle now? He hadn't figured on this. He hadn't seen what his father looked like till to-day; he hadn't seen what his father *was* till now. He went around the other way of the table, wiping his hands on his pants, and sat down; and still he couldn't get away from those crazy eyes or from that low-toned, almost whispering voice.

"You meal-mouthed sissy; you son of something—no son of mine; you white-gutted skunk; you—you—"

At the full of it the door had opened and Addie stood there in it, a suitcase in either hand.

"Well?" she said.

In the silence, in the dark of the yard there was the sound of an engine and a crackle of frosted mud as tires backed, turned, and gathered way, and at the last a dying hail: "So-long, good-by."

"Well?" She set the suitcases down, closed the door, and faced them.

Ray sat there like a lump. He hadn't emptied the can; what could he do or say? Then there came a new dread. If she were to let anything out; if ever his father were to know about that telephone! He sat up. He tried to wink. He began to stammer. "How'd you c-c-come, Ma? If you'd 've told me I could 've dr-dr-drove down."

"Oh, no bother about that. A friend kindly offered to bring me up. Mr. Hedge, a gentleman that works for your Uncle Albert in the garage, he was so good as to drive me up. He's been very good to me this winter, Mr. Hedge has."

She returned her eyes to the wooden image of Joslin.

"Well?"

She looked so queer. So strange. She had on a nice dress that fitted her, a nice hat, and brown kid gloves which she began now to pull off, her hands looking white under

them as they appeared. She seemed to have lost some flesh but she had good color, high color, and her eyes were bright.

"Well?" she said for the fourth time. "Where's Frankie, in bed? I brought him a present; isn't it pretty?" She had it out in her hand, a bright, brand-new harmonica. "I hope he'll like it and be satisfied."

Joslin stirred. He ran a sleeve over his mouth and backed away two or three stiff steps till he stood by the drainboard. His eyes still looked crazy and his voice was still low, almost a whisper.

"Well, you keep on saying 'Well?' Well what? Has hell froze over?"

"Oh, yes. Oh, long ago."

If there was anything on her face it was like a smile.

"Well, wife?"

"Oh, yes." She walked to the drainboard and, laying her gloves and the harmonica among the dishes, she dipped her hands into the lye, then drew them out and held them away to dribble on the floor. A spot of pink lay on either cheek-bone and her eyes were as shiny as dry diamonds.

"Now," she said in a queer light voice, "I hope we're all satisfied."

It was too sudden for Joslin and too complete; the strain of being adamant when he was only flesh-and-blood had been too long. All he could do was blow his nose and mumble: "There, Addie my girl, good girl. . . ."

Ray went to pieces too. With him it was all the winter's bitterness. His face down in his hands, he cried: "Aw, if you was going to do it, why for Goll sake couldn't you've done it last fall and had it done with, Ma?"

Addie had a slow brain. She stared at happy Joslin, then at Ray.

"Why couldn't I—" She stopped there. A slow brain, but it arrived.

Another moment and the room was filled with a soft sound of laughter.

She left them and went upstairs. She passed into Frankie's room and stood looking down at him in the little moonlight from the window.

The thought came to her: "You'd say I ought to kneel down." But she didn't; she sat on the bed's edge. "I oughtn't to give him this, or at least I should think I'd oughtn't." But she slid the new harmonica under his pillow. "I'd always have supposed I'd have cried for shame." She bent and kissed his hair and went to her own room.

She stood at the window gazing out. Under the moon the farm sloped away, gently swelling smooth fields like pale breasts on the mountain against the black hem of the woods below.

The thought that came to her in the top layer was: We'll sow it in rye this year; I like the green of rye growing; the oats can go in the waste piece. But that's so, there isn't any waste piece any more.

In the bottom layer of her thoughts was this: I'll make it yield because it belongs to me; it's part of me—the land, the stock, the men. But I'm not part of it. I'm not its property; I'm my own. I can go have a time in town with George and them, or I can stay here. And because I want to stay here, I'll stay, and I'll make it yield.

"How 'd you like some buckwheat cakes to go to bed on?" she called down presently from the top of the stairs. . . .

THE AMATEUR

By

Phoebe H. Gilkyson

THE mail-train had left the station, and the alarm clanged at the crossing, but the little gray roadster skimmed impudently over the track under the very nose of the locomotive. The mail-time gathering at Smink's General Store stirred appreciatively: young Mrs. Wynne's arrival was always enlivening. She swung her car neatly into an open space between the low porch and the dappled trunk of a tall buttonwood tree and vaulted out in high good humor; she habitually played to an audience, real or imaginary, and one of the few relaxations she permitted herself since her marriage was to come occasionally for the morning mail and make a dashing descent upon the village as lady of the manor among the varletry.

Rainwashed sunlight of early June spun a becoming aura about her as she ran up the steps, and she flashed her best smile at old Mrs. Fye, who sat on a bench fanning herself with a sunbonnet. Within the building she patted a child's tow head and installed herself on an upturned barrel to wait while Mr. Smink laboriously sorted and stamped the letters. She was agreeably aware of shy admiring glances from the country folk and knew she made a charming girlish picture in her trim linen gown against the dingy background of the store. She never smoked cigarettes or wore sophisticated clothes in Wynnedale, but the sacrifice thus entailed was

compensated by her satisfaction as an artist at fitting herself so well into the picture. One no longer heard the whisper of "movie actress" in connection with "Peter Paige Wynne's new wife." Now they merely murmured "Young Mrs. Wynne."

An odor of peanuts and soap and gum boots mingled within the store, and Becky yawned as Mr. Smink slowly popped the letters into their honeycomb of receptacles. Four, six, eight letters and a bundle of papers had gone into the Wynne box; it bulged importantly over its less favored fellows. The Wynnes, as befitting feudal lords of the locality, had a box of special size. Perhaps in the world beyond the hills of Brinton County their name had lost, with gradually failing fortunes, something of its old glamour and potency, but here its importance remained an unwavering tradition. Becky knew of the consternation caused by Paige's marriage, less than a year ago "—in the movies, my dear, and not even a star. Just a character actress and not pretty unless you like that thin gypsy type. No money, and heaven knows where she came from; somewhere in the Middle West. . . ." It had been as great a triumph to establish herself with the obscure gentlefolk about Wynnedale as might have been the social conquest of a smarter locality, and even more difficult. But Becky had the reputation of thoroughly mastering her rôles. . . . She and Paige had planned to live nearer Philadelphia, where he had a good business opening and she a wider scope for her talents; but for some reason she wasn't quite ready to leave Wynnedale. . . .

Mr. Smink slammed down the wicket and the villagers filed by, pausing to gossip and compare mail-order catalogues. Becky, graciously receiving the Wynne apportionment, realized that she had again forgotten the mail-bag. It

was a strict rule that no one should get the mail without a bag for safekeeping: life at Wynne Hall was made up of quaint details that became of actual importance by virtue of long custom. Becky was amused at the childlike feeling of guilt which assailed her for the moment; she was in danger, she told herself, of taking Wynnedale seriously. But the sight of a letter directed to her in a familiar backhand scrawl diverted her attention and, stuffing the other mail into a crack in the seat of her car, she climbed in to enjoy some pages of gossip. It was from Gay, good old Gay, the one being on earth with whom she had shared her fears and hopes and plans in the old days. Gay too was married now, to a wealthy manufacturer, and was absorbed in a fast little world of her own on the semi-smart fringes of New York.

The letter—whose Special Delivery stamp hadn't hastened its arrival appreciably—retailed the information that Gay and her husband, with a congenial couple, were motoring through Philadelphia, and couldn't Becky and Paige meet them on Wednesday night for dinner at that amusing new hotel near Overbrook?

"You see, Becky, old thing," ran the letter, "I have tact enough not to bring this bunch to Wynnedale, much as I'd like to see you milking cows on the old homestead. But something tells me we'd be congenial as Capital and Labor with your in-laws. Honest, dearie, Paige is sure a sweet thing and I suppose you know your mind but I often wonder how can you stand those mossy old swells. If you'd stayed in the business Sam Dunne would of given you a big part this year and you'd of been famous in no time and drawing big money. He told Edna that you had real screen personality. Or you could of married that rich Kelly fellow, and been sailing around in your own yacht this minute. But you and I both know, dearie, that you had more brains

than the rest of us and if you got what you want stick to it and God bless you. But don't forget the old days. Come early Wed. night. Tell Paige we'll bring plenty of hooch. As I remember, he doesn't mind diluting his blue blood with alcohol once in a while. . . ."

Wednesday . . . why, this was Wednesday! That meant they must start by five; it was a two-hour run to Philadelphia. It would be fun to see Gay again! A pang of homesickness smote her and she wondered, for a moment, if it would make her restless to revive old memories. She headed her car away from Wynne Hall; she would go home by the longer road, over the hill, for she found it easier to think with the rush of air in her face and power under her feet. Gay never would believe that Becky's marriage had been a love-match, or that during her brief acquaintance with Peter Paige Wynne he had spoken as vaguely of his family and background as she had of hers. "Country people . . . good old things, but rather slow," he had said. That the astute Becky Thorne should succumb to nothing more significant than a man's slow smile and absent-minded courtesy, the set of his rather shabby English clothes, and the little ripple in his short fair hair was quite inconceivable to Gay, and she regarded her friend's surrender with suspicion. Later, when it appeared that he was the son of a distinguished, if somewhat impoverished Pennsylvania family, Gay had laughed knowingly and asked who had given Becky the tip. One couldn't explain to Gay that she had recognized something in Peter Paige himself which answered, vaguely, her hunger for superiority; the hunger which had dominated her from childhood and carried her beyond each goal that she had established for herself. If she had wanted wealth or social prominence she certainly might have done better, for the Wynnes were a stock which had begun to go to seed. He

was neither brilliant nor forceful, but he had the mysterious quality of fineness that never failed to stir her in its manifestation. . . .

At full speed Beck topped the hill by the church, and as she dipped again a gust of wind caught the pile of letters, whirled them overhead, and scattered them maliciously along the road. Still busy with her thoughts, Becky stopped the car and gathered them hastily. There had been eight letters beside the papers, she remembered, and she could find only seven. Perhaps she had miscounted. But there had surely been a long yellow envelope. . . . She ran back along the road for a hundred yards and searched the tall grass on either side, but found nothing. It was probably an advertisement, she told herself irritably, and returned, warm and cross, to her car. The Wynnes wrote too many letters anyhow, and got too many. It would be better for them if they lived more and scribbled less. . . . She let out her motor again, whirling down the hill and into the village in a cloud of dust, scattering a flock of white chickens and grazing the nose of a surprised old horse. Beyond the village, on the old post road to Philadelphia, the drowsy sweetness of honeysuckle drenched the stone gateway of Wynne Hall.

As she swung up the drive the shadowy stillness of venerable evergreen trees closed in behind her, and at the head of the somewhat shaggy lawn these gave way to masses of glossy rhododendron that banked the flagged court before the house. The country roads she had just traversed meant nothing to Becky; their steep little rounded hills and aisled orchards were just so much vacancy to her. But Wynne Hall stirred something within her, a wonderment and satisfaction not unmixed with sadness. Although its white pillars were in need of paint it bore the aura of a gracious past,

tangible as the pungence of its boxwood hedges. There was nothing of pseudo-colonial or renovated farmhouse about it, like so many of the dwellings in this part of Pennsylvania. It belonged frankly to the thirties, when high ceilings and ample doorways and big windows, fine woodwork and low-tread hospitable stairs bespoke hospitality and easeful living. It was a square house of weather-worn stucco over stone, with pillared entrances on the north and east sides and a wide veranda on the south and west. The kitchen and servants' quarters were in a separate building, joined to the house by a covered way above ground, with a subterranean passage beneath. Within, the furniture was a curious mixture of fine old simplicity and Victorian rococo; certainly no one could mistake it for the work of a professional decorator.

The wide front door stood open in the June warmth, and as Becky mounted the steps old colored Cæsar, who had come from Maryland with Paige's mother when she married, shuffled forward to meet her.

"Ole Mahs' Wynne say, will you please, ma'am, come out in de back gya'den," he announced unctuously. "He bin waitin' fo' to speak to you." He grinned and muttered approvingly as Becky ran down the paneled hall. Cæsar found "Miz Paige" endlessly pretty and amusing.

The south veranda gave upon a flagged terrace that sloped to the formal gardens below and overlooked the green lowlands of the creek valley, where a herd of Holstein cattle stood like tiny inlays of ivory and onyx in an enamelled panel. The young summer sun had not yet burned the freshness of spring from the shrubbery and the tall boxwood hedges, Wynne Hall's pride, were darkly green as burnished metal in the morning light. The lilacs were done blooming and it was too early for the riotous color of the flowerbeds, but the first roses were in bud, and Mother

Wynne moved among them with her clippers, a beautiful tragic note in her black dress. Becky paused in the doorway, approving the scene. She never had possessed a family of her own in this sense, and to see them grouped here against that effective backdrop made her think of an old Southern play. Miss Janet (Paige's thin, intellectual aunt) sat in a whirl of papers at a wicker table on the veranda; Miss Rose (the gentle, plump aunt) was reading to her father out on the grass by the magnolia tree.

Grandfather Wynne in his wheel-chair was hardly the genial, snowy-haired Southern colonel of the picture, but Grandfather Wynne bore no stamp of a set pattern. His clean-shaven face—thin and parchment-pale—was nervous and mobile, with black piercing eyes under heavy brows; and his hair, fiercely curling, had dulled rather than grayed with time. He had a long, almost cruel upper lip, but when he smiled his mouth was kindly and sometimes tender. Becky at heart was desperately afraid of him for she felt that he penetrated the poses that were so indispensable a part of her; but, as always, she took refuge in playing to her invisible audience with the role of girlish vivacity at the feet of venerable wisdom.

Gaily she moved across the grass to him. She had learned the quick slender gait of a trained dancer and knew its value in crossing an open space under critical eyes. With a little half-mocking courtesy she handed him the bundle of mail.

"You wished to see me, sir?" she asked in her best Virginia accent. This sweet elliptic drawl was one of her best assets; she had acquired it two years before while boarding with a Southern family in Brooklyn.

"Major Carney left this for you," he told her, handing her a folded paper. "He thought it necessary to apologize to me, but explained that he had warned you several times.

Naturally, he can't continue to show undue leniency merely because you are my granddaughter-in-law."

Major Carney was Wynnedale's autocratic old justice of the peace, and an implacable foe to fast driving. Becky had been amused by his reprimands and in New York would have considered a summons for speeding a huge joke, but now it didn't seem quite so funny under the polite gaze of her husband's family. She knew that in their eyes it was a regrettable lapse, and exasperation welled within her: did they expect her to make herself over completely to their ænemic standards? Heaven knew she had tried hard enough, but one is human. . . . For a moment her old self awoke and wanted to swear—to give these people a real jolt. But she had trained herself always to burn her bridges behind her: she never reverted to a lesser rôle. She was a *grande dame* now; a Wynne. So in a calm bored manner she took the paper and folded it deliberately.

"How amusing!" she remarked. "I suppose one should be grateful for a new sensation, no matter what." She moved with conscious grace toward the house.

"One moment, Rebecca," called Mr. Wynne, looking up abstractedly. "Did Cæsar give you all the letters?" This spoiled her exit, and annoyed her.

"I went to the post office myself," she replied shortly.

"Odd! That letter always comes on the sixth," he commented, half to himself.

Mentally she destroyed the lost letter; it simply never had existed for her. It was impossible to admit carelessness just then. She gave him a wide, rather plaintive glance from her long-lashed eyes.

"That's all there were," she stated, and moved again toward the house.

In her room she was aware that the little incident had

lowered her high spirits; she must be growing hyper-sensitive in this chaste atmosphere, she told herself. It would do her good to see Gay again, even if her friends were a bit vulgar. One needed a whiff of vulgarity now and then. She laid out several evening gowns and deliberated which she should wear that night; it had been months since she had worn evening clothes.

She studied her face in the mirror: it was thin and elfish, with a rather wide red mouth, beautiful teeth, straight nose, and long narrow gray eyes. She wore no makeup at Wynnedale and her sleek, dark, close-cropped hair made her look like a boy; but she had animation and intelligence in her face; no one could call her ordinary-looking. She thought of her arrival at Wynne Hall eight months before, when Paige had brought her home to visit after their honeymoon. She had been entirely conscious of the Wynnes' misgivings about his sudden alliance and it pleased her to feel that they could find no flaw in her speech, dress, or manner. Indeed she had been almost disconcerted to find them so simple and kindly, for she had schooled herself to more of the grand manner. It had been at her insistence that she and Peter Paige had stayed on at Wynne Hall: at first because she saw that he was needed in managing the place since his father's death; later because there was something that puzzled her, something she wanted to understand about this family. There never was a hint of the friction that proverbially exists between in-laws; and yet a subtle reserve seemed to underlie their kindness. It was the same quality in essence that had marked Paige as different from the wealthy young blades who had formerly constituted her idea of aristocracy, and somehow after eight months she seemed further than ever from analyzing this difference. She was going through the motions of an intimacy which didn't exist, and

of late she had felt a growing uneasiness that something she might do or say would define the fact that she was hopelessly alien in spirit. Always she had appropriated any quality she admired: an accent, a gesture, a laugh; and had endured the gibes of her friends at what they chose to call affectation. For she knew it was more than affectation; she assimilated the thing she affected and made it a part of her. Mediocrity was the unforgivable sin to Becky, and her twenty-four years had been a tireless process of discard and selection. Was she, for the first time in her life, to be defeated in a characterization? How Gay would laugh to see her take the Wynnes so seriously! To her they would seem finicking and unimportant.

From her window Becky saw Peter Paige, in faded khaki riding clothes, jump off his horse and cross the lawn to his mother. He was warm and dirty from the farm but it was impossible for him to look uncouth, no matter what he wore. She thrilled as always at his easy grace. Everything she had studied and striven for was innate with him, and although she knew she was stronger than he and would always dominate him, his very weaknesses were those of caste. . . . She heard voices on the terraces and assumed that he was being told of her fall from grace, but when a minute later he appeared upstairs his face expressed only his usual pleasure at the sight of her.

"Why drag all your gowns out?" he inquired, indicating the bed. "Going to have a sale?" She told him of the propective trip to the city.

"Fine! Put out my things too, will you? Must run down to the P. O. after luncheon; Grandfather is worried about a letter."

Becky flushed. "I can't seem to convince him that it didn't come," she said coldly.

He stared. "Oh! So *you* got the mail! Did you take the bag?"

"Of course I did." She turned her back. "I suppose they think me completely untrustworthy since I got pinched."

"You got what?" His amazement was genuine.

"Didn't they tell you that, either?" Becky was amazed too. These Wynnes certainly weren't human. Or perhaps, she thought, if they really loved her as one of themselves they wouldn't be so beastly polite. "I'm to appear before the Major to-morrow for speeding. Isn't it a scream? And I drive so carefully, too. You know I do."

"Really, Becka?" His face clouded slightly although he smiled.

"I'm afraid the family are horrified," she told him airily. "Hope the Major doesn't make it too heavy. I'm sorry, old son; I won't do it again."

"It isn't the fine, you know," Paige explained with some effort. He hated to talk seriously. "It's simply the—the Wynne name, you know. They like our women to—well, to stand well about here, among the country people. Old-fashioned rot, of course. And you've been wonderful, Becka," he added hastily. "I know it's been awfully slow for you. But you wanted to stay, didn't you?"

Becky was studying him objectively as he talked, with an odd tenderness in her eyes. The quaint exploded theory of putting women on a pedestal fitted, somehow, with Paige's beautiful thin face; his high-bridge nose and cleft chin and amiable—too amiable—mouth. In repose his face held always something of wistfulness; one could picture him with a high black stock at his throat. . . .

"Pete," she demanded suddenly, "why did you marry me?"

"I s'pose I married you for your money, child," he told her with cheerful sarcasm.

"Pete," she persisted, "is there anything wrong with me —anything you'd like to change very much?" He regarded her with frank approval.

"Miss Becky," he pronounced, "you're the rightest thing I know of."

He was undoubtedly the most satisfactory person in the world. She laughed and told him to hurry and wash for luncheon, but as she ran downstairs she had a sudden realization that Paige was more self-sufficient than she. Lovable and easy-going as he was, no one person or thing could ever be entirely indispensable to him. She, Becky, wasn't like that. . . .

At luncheon she was unusually silent, and studied his family objectively as she had studied Paige. Mother Wynne, with her shining silver hair, presided over the meal, gently solicitous for everyone's comfort but always half-abstracted, never wholly engaged. Paige's detachment was inherited from her but she was more emotional than he; with quick girlish gestures when she talked that showed her strain of French blood, and a naïve literalness that never followed the quick nonsensical humor which Paige shared with his grandfather. The men were inclined to tease her and laugh at her impractical comments, but at times she descended from her clouds with a sort of sublimated logic that went straight to the heart of a discussion; and her final word, to all of them, was law. Becky admired her with a shy awe that she couldn't entirely overcome; she was so beautiful and so at peace, so different from the garrulous matrons Becky had known elsewhere. She had seen her one morning with heavy silver braids which hung to her knees, and thought her like an enchanted princess whose eyes, still brave in the

unspent youth of her spirit, held gentle surprise to find how long she had slept. . . .

The meal was nearly over when the door-knocker clanged and Cæsar, returning after a moment, carried a letter on a tray—a letter in a long yellow envelope.

"Mist' Charley Jennings say he foun' dis yer lettah on de road dis mawnin'," he explained to Mr. Wynne.

There was an involuntary pause in the conversation and Becky felt they were trying not to look at her. She managed her contrition very well and berated her own carelessness with childlike remorse. "How perfectly dreadful of me! I should really be punished! I don't remember seeing it at all!" But the muscles about her mouth and eyes felt unpleasantly constricted and her hands were clenched under the table. Everyone began to talk again, almost too animatedly, but a constraint had frosted the air and she saw that Peter Paige had flushed.

After the meal he waited and rumpled her hair, as though to apologize for an unworthy suspicion, and as they lingered old Cæsar shuffled up, carrying the letter-bag.

"'Tain't yo' fault you los' dat lettah, Miz Paige," he assured her kindly. "I tuk dis ole bag las' night t' put new strap on huh an' fo'got to put it back dis mawnin'. Lettah's boun' to git los' when you ain't got no bag."

This time it was Becky who flushed; then she laughed irrepressibly. "Well, I'm out of luck to-day!" she cried flippantly. "The Lord must have meant me to be an honest woman, for I'm certainly the world's most unsuccessful liar."

Paige laughed too, but did it rather unconvincingly, and a hurt, surprised look had come into his eyes. He was the least self-righteous of men, but Becky saw with a pang that he didn't find this amusing. It was the first time he had

caught her in an outright fib and he was frankly bewildered by it. She read in his face that it cast a shadow back over other things she had told him and made a dozen doubtful points assume a more doubtful color. He lighted a cigarette in an effort to be casual, but his mouth was set in a strange line. An unreasoning rage mounted within her. How silly of him to make so much of such a trifle! And how silly of her to feel so cheapened, so petty, when she had scarificed so much for him!

"I'll see if the car is in shape," he said evenly, and ran his hand over his crisply curling hair as he always did when puzzled. "You'd better rest for a while before you dress," he added as he walked slowly down the hall. Overhead the family portraits gazed down on Becky with stiff disapproval: those superior, disagreeable old Wynnes. . . .

Becky did lie down, and shed a few angry tears, but found no sleep. When it was time to dress she deliberately chose her gayest gown and rouged her face and lips. They started out in the little car and Paige pretended to be in high spirits; she knew he wanted to assure her, in his inarticulate way, that everything was all right.

But Becky's gaiety was gone and the subsequent party, so far as she was concerned, was a failure. Gay, she discovered, was getting fat; her trim outlines had blurred grotesquely. She wore too much jewelry and still had that loud laugh. If Gay were out of luck, ill or unhappy, her old affection might reassert itself; but prosperity sat unbecomingly upon her.

Peter Paige, always sensitive to a situation, felt that he was to blame for his wife's low spirits and redoubled his own liveliness. He danced a great deal, insisted upon playing the drum in the orchestra, produced champagne after a whispered discussion with a waiter, and drank more

than was good for him. Becky refused more than one glass and was irritated to see Paige grow flushed and incoherent. Then men in Gay's party had thick necks and wore rings. The crowning annoyance was when Gay asked her with loud giggles which father she used in Wynnedale, the college professor or the Virginia clergyman. . . . At eleven o'clock Becky insisted upon starting home.

She took the wheel herself and Paige, sliding down in the wide seat, slept immediately. It was a warm night, lightly overclouded, and the air like damp velvet against her cheek was sweet with honeysuckle along the country roads. In the lowlands her headlight stirred pallid veilings of mist. She drove as one in a dream; she felt, she told herself, like a snail or whatever the creature is that has outgrown one shell and can't find another to crawl into. Had these more-or-less decayed gentlefolk bewitched her that she should take them so seriously? They had lost most of their money, their name was becoming forgotten, they lacked ambition and aggressiveness, they were content to sit peacefully at home, marking time against the seasons. And yet this attitude cheapened for her all of the old values. For a moment she envied Gay, whose mind held smugly to standards it understood.

She threaded an old covered bridge, whose dry bones rattled beneath the rush of her wheels, and her headlight cast queer dusty shadows along the rafters. She was on the home-stretch now; the village lay beyond, although at this hour no lights were in evidence. Paige still slept.

Rounding a slight bend, a pair of blazing headlights cut like knives from out of the blackness—an automobile was approaching at top speed. She drew over as far as the road permitted, blinking against the sudden glare. She was within fifty yards of the other car when she saw a man move

in the shadows before her, a negro, undoubtedly drunk, and wavering in pitiful confusion between the two batteries of light. Her brakes screamed and wheels dragged as she stopped, giving him an ample margin, but he staggered directly in the path of the other car. It swerved, but not enough, and struck him fairly, hurling him across the road, where he crashed in a dreadful heap upon the stones of a broken wall. She seemed to hear the impact of his body with every nerve, as though she herself had been struck.

The strange car sucked past her like a dark torpedo and she cried out, sick with horror. Incredibly, they did not mean to stop; she saw the tiny red light vanish around the bend. Sobbing with helpless rage she half-turned her car in pursuit, but reason told her this was useless. She could do nothing in this lonely stretch of valley. Even a telephone warning from the village to other stations was hopeless; she had no way to identify the car.

There was nothing to do but carry the poor man in to the village, and she leaned over to arouse Peter Paige. But with hand outstretched she stopped, as another aspect of the situation dawned upon her. He had been asleep and had seen nothing; the victim, even if he were alive—which was improbable—had been too drunk to know who struck him. Her recent arrest would have an ugly significance, and the story of a mystery-car on this lonely road at midnight sounded ridiculously flimsy. Would anyone—would even Peter Paige believe her?

Her throat felt dry and constricted and a weakness gripped her muscles. She knew, had she been guilty, she might have manufactured just such a story. Of course no case could be proved against her; she had no anxiety on that score. But everyone would think she had lied. She could feel again that dreadful pause at dinner, see those strange

lines about her husband's mouth. It was cruel that she should have to face such a situation at this time, just as she felt herself at a definite disadvantage with her husband's family. She knew they would suffer less from the thought of her guilt than from her doubtful claim of innocence. Indeed, if she were lying she could carry it off much better; in the nervous excitement of playing a part she was at her best, while now her anxiety to be believed would confuse her, make her unconvincing.

To drive on at once, without a word to anyone, was the only alternative; but that was quite unthinkable. Lie she might, but she had never been a rotter, and if there were any life in this poor creature he must be carried to the nearest doctor. Well, this was no time for acting; she must be herself, the most difficult role of all, a role she was sure to botch. Seizing her husband by the shoulder, she shook him vigorously.

"Pete, wake up! Wake up! There's been an accident!" Her voice seemed inadequate and parrotlike, as though she were repeating someone else's words. He opened his eyes and blinked at her dully.

"Accident? Where? Who?"

"Somebody hurt! A man—badly hurt—I'm afraid he's killed!" Paige was alert instantly and she saw horror in his face.

"Who did it?" he asked instantly.

If he had asked anything but that, and so directly, Becky might have assembled her wits. But now, forced to meet his apprehension, something collapsed within her. She stammered incoherently, "A strange car—they wouldn't stop! He stepped in front, right in front—they struck him and threw him clear across the road! Oh, Pete, they went on, they wouldn't stop!"

He was completely sobered now and peered at her sharply in the dim light.

"Brace up, Becka! I don't understand; talk straight! *Who did it?*"

The fear in his voice, in his face, was plain; and Becky knew that the fear was of her—fear that she would lie to him. There was a little pause in which something within her struggled blindly and helplessly. It was unendurable. This couldn't go on; Paige must believe in her at any cost.

"I did," she said deliberately. "He was drunk and I struck him." Her courage returned in a flood. With the familiar thrill of the creative artist she faced again her invisible audience. It was only in playing a part that she could be truly herself, and here was a rôle that fired and stimulated her. The fearless admission of guilt—here was the Wynne manner, and she could handle it impeccably.

She jumped out of the car, with Paige stumbling after, and bent over the dreadful huddled thing by the wall.

"It's a negro, a tramp . . . we must carry him to Doctor Reed's at once. Hurry! I can take his feet." Between them they lifted the poor broken wretch into the car. "You drive," bade Becky, supporting the man's head on her lap and wiping the blood from his face with her scarf. "Oh Pete, Pete, I want to die! I've killed him, I've killed him!"

Paige was all gentleness and sympathy.

"Poor old girl, hell of a shock for you. Now I want you to keep quiet about this; I'm going to say it was me. It will sound much better."

"No, no!" She clutched frantically at his arm. "Don't you dare, Pete! I—I couldn't bear it; you mustn't! Don't you see, it's—it's mine, and I'm going through with it! I couldn't bear it any other way!"

"But really, Becka—"

"No, no!" Her voice rose hysterically, and to quiet her he had to give in. This was a farcical possibility she hadn't anticipated but she was touched too at his wanting to lie for her, as she in her own way was lying for him.

A hoarse and sleepy doctor in an office that reeks of drugs pronounced the negro unquestionably dead, and at the sight of her own bloody hands and dress in the light, Becky fainted quite genuinely. Paige took her home and tucked her in bed with a tenderness she had never seen in him, and Becky was appropriately tragic and spent and gentle. . . .

Next morning Paige had broken the news to his family before she awoke, and Becky, quite honestly exhausted by the night's nervous strain, heightened their affectionate solicitude by wanly declining to eat any breakfast. Her determination to shield Paige had touched them and for the first time in her life Becky found herself an object of the clan spirit that rallies to its own in time of stress. They extolled her skill and quick wit in driving, and unanimously agreed that the man must have been either a drunken vagabond or a deliberate suicide. When Becky insisted upon arising and seeking out Major Carney to tell her story, she was firmly ordered to remain in her room and rest while Grandfather Wynne notified the Major by telephone that he must come to the house if he wished to get her statement about the accident. Doctor Reed had been permitted to think that they had found the man already injured in the road, so the Major was quite unaware of her intended confession.

Becky, revelling at heart in the warmth of the family's anxiety, pursued her rôle of martyr by dressing and going downstairs to wait for him, and Cæsar sniffed frankly at the sight of her pale grave face as she descended. He had a stubborn fear that she might be handcuffed and dragged

off to prison, and confidentially asked Paige if he should get out his ole shotgun.

All hovered about her cushioned chair on the veranda, and Aunt Rose tried in vain to tempt her appetite with special dishes. "You must keep up your strength, my dear!" When Grandfather Wynne patted her arm and said "We're all standing by, Rebecca!" and Mother Wynne called her a brave little girl, Becky looked at them slowly, with an odd swelling in her throat, and wondered why, in her own personality, she never had succeeded in getting so near to them as this. . . . On a sudden impulse she arose and asked Grandfather Wynne if she might speak to him alone for a moment in his study.

No one seemed surprised; the Wynnes never showed surprise at anything. Paige wheeled the old gentleman into the little book-lined room, with its black-marble mantle and old walnut furniture and oval photographs of bewhiskered relatives; then after a questioning glance at Becky, left them alone, closing the door after him. Becky stood by the table, pulling at her handkerchief.

"Have you," she asked, "a copy of *Æsop's Fables?*"

He indicated a place on one of the shelves that lined the the room. Finding the book, she turned the pages and laid it before him, open at the story of "Wolf, Wolf!"

Seriously she inquired, "Is that the only reason one shouldn't lie? Because an emergency might occur when you want to be believed?"

"Isn't that an excellent reason?" he countered amiably.

"Then if one is clever enough not to get caught, it doesn't matter?"

After a pause he said, "Won't you sit down, Rebecca?" She perched stiffly on the edge of a chair.

"I lied to you yesterday about your letter," she said directly. "Please don't pretend you didn't know it."

"Very well," he replied as directly, "I won't."

"But I didn't come here to apologize," she went on. "It's more important than that. You see, I'm not sorry I lied; I'm only sorry I was found out."

"At least," he commented gravely, "you are no hypocrite."

"I suppose I lack moral sense, whatever that means," she stated, "for I have no feeling about it at all, except that it has put me in an undignified position. . . . I've always had to bluff and scheme a bit; I'd be in a country town this minute washing dishes for my stepmother if I'd been afraid to lie now and then. I'm not ashamed of it. I never had anybody to tell me things but I've always known what was real when I saw it, and after seeing it nothing less would satisfy me. I hate anything second-rate. And now, if anything of my old self is going to come between me and Pete, it's got to go. I've scrapped a lot of it and I'll scrap the rest. But you Wynnes have got me puzzled. I've always been good at picking up new ideas and I know I can learn your ways if you'll just explain certain things to me." She played to no audience now and the words came bluntly, painfully. "For instance, how can you remember to speak the truth in an emergency, when you're afraid, or want something very much, and haven't time to think? It isn't religion, is it? For you don't seem very religious. You must have a better reason than that."

Grandfather Wynne laughed oddly.

"I'm afraid, Rebecca, that you are an insatiable idealist."

After a moment she suggested, "You are laughing at me?"

"Not in the least," he assured her. "The fact is, I am flattered by your fearing me enough to lie to me." He

paused reflectively. "To care so much what people say and think is very natural—and very youthful—but the world doesn't merit being taken so seriously. Later, when you find that no man is worthy of your fear and that ambition is dust in its attainment, you will turn from facts to ideas and explore the terrible simplicity of truth for the beauty you have begun to crave." He leaned back and put his finger-tips together, enjoying this opportunity to be didactic. "But to do this you must be disillusioned and very weary; so weary you can transmit to your children very slight conviction of life's importance. By that time the world will be done with you, and one way or another will destroy you.

"So even if I could help you to such a viewpoint, I doubt if you would thank me. And it would be a very bad thing for us all, my dear Rebecca, to lose your passion for living. Without your ardor the world would be a dreary place, like a picture gallery with no one to look at the pictures or a library with no one to read the books." He hesitated a moment. "As for Peter Paige, it was a stronger and older instinct than either of you understands which drew you together. He has the unconcern with practical essentials that makes him for destruction. Unless . . . unless you can save him." His stern upper lip had curled a very little. He would rather see Paige destroyed, thought Becky without rancor; he can't quite forgive me for being stronger.

Grandfather Wynne raised his head and spoke more animatedly, as though to divert his own thoughts from a depressing channel.

"It is a craving for texture, for urbanity in your contacts that has dominated you, my dear Rebecca," he went on, "but this has led you unexpectedly to a sense of personal dignity; which after all is a more active agent for virtue than all the copy-book platitudes in the world. For instance,

in the crisis of last night's accident you were almost overzealous to take the blame—"

Very pale, Becky had risen again to her feet when a rap at the door interrupted and Cæsar announced Major Carney. The venerable "Squire," chewing tobacco and arrayed in a rusty blue coat that he always wore officially, bowed and scraped and removed his hat. Paige, who followed him in, crossed over to Becky and assumed a protective attitude which secretly pleased her.

"Sorry to be late," observed the Major importantly, "but I got some more news on the accident last night, and all I got to do now is to tally it with what you and the Missus saw, Paige."

Becky's heart seemed to stand still.

"A car broke down at Heebertown, ten miles from here, with engine trouble early this morning. The fellows at the garage identified it as stolen, and since a mud-guard was bent and splashed with blood they cross-questioned the two men in the car pretty close. The younger one broke down and told everything, tryin' to square himself. He says they struck a nigger down here near the covered bridge about one this morning, so the police 'phoned to me about it. Doctor Reed says it was soon after one when you brought him in."

Paige was radiant, but Grandfather Wynne surveyed Becky inscrutably.

"Unfortunately," he commented, "my grandson was asleep and saw nothing, and Mrs. Wynne was so upset by the tragedy that she tells rather a confused story."

"Mrs. Wynne," asked the Major, clearing his throat, "did you pass another car before finding the man in the road? Or did you see him actually struck?"

"I—I don't remember," she answered stupidly. So her silly game was spoiled, and no one ever would believe her

again. She opened and closed her hands helplessly, as though she had dropped something fragile and precious.

Then suddenly she raised them to her face and began to cry. The effect was magical; instantly all three men began to scold each other and to reassure her.

"Can't you see she was too much upset to know what she saw?" demanded Paige, his arm around her. "Let her alone, can't you. I remember now, she *did* try to tell me something about another car!"

"I suppose it's natural in a woman," admitted the Major, who had outlived two wives. "I thought mebbe we could get her to remember, gradual-like, what happened."

"I really feel," said Grandfather Wynne, "that she shouldn't be troubled further. It was a shocking experience for a young woman."

"We'll let it drop for the present," agreed the Major, mopping his brow. "Since the other fellow admits his guilt, with an eyewitness, she may's well forgit all about it. And I think it'll be a lesson to her, so I'll let her off the summons I put on her yesterd'y. And now, I'll bid you all good day." Accepting a handful of cigars, he withdrew, obviously relieved.

"The poor man!" moaned Becky, looking up with a distraught, wild-eyed manner reminiscent of Ophelia. "It was so terrible! I didn't know—I wasn't sure! So I thought I did it!"

"Paige, in my eyes you really are to blame," said old Mr. Wynne severely. "You had no business to be in such a state that you had to let a woman assume the responsibility of driving at night."

Becky stopped weeping and barely restrained a sniff of derision. She could drive better than Paige at any hour.

"Pete," she said abruptly, "go tell your mother that every-

thing's all right. I'll join you in the garden in a minute. I want to collect my thoughts first."

He started to kiss her, from the exuberance of his relief, but his natural hatred of public demonstration formed a complex that resulted in a glancing peck on her eyebrow.

"Three rousing cheers," he observed, and swung out of the room.

Grandfather Wynne still watched her inscrutably.

"Well," said Becky, with rather a mirthless laugh, "they'll all try to believe I was hysterical and didn't know what I was saying . . . so I'm just where I was before. For you see, I knew perfectly well that I didn't hit the man. I saw the other car do it."

"Well, God bless my soul!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "Why on earth—"

"Because I knew Paige wouldn't believe me; that no one would believe me. And I simply—couldn't—bear it." She emphasized each word, like a child telling a story. "You would pretend to, but secretly you would be ashamed. I would be further than ever from becoming one of you. . . ."

"You thought we'd rather see you arrested?" asked the old gentleman drily.

"At least then you'd be sorry for me," she admitted.

He shook his head slowly. "What a lot of damned old humbugs we are!" he remarked, half to himself, and fumbled absently with a pile of papers. After an interval he reached out and patted her hand. "You feel that we think ourselves superior, don't you, my dear? Well, remember this: that at heart we are only envious. Not because you get what you want, child, but because you want it, so very much. . . ."

A wood-robin called in the magnolia tree by the window and the dusty copper light of late afternoon touched old

bindings on the wall opposite. All was silent except for the fretted rasp of papers beneath the old man's fingers. Then, since he seemed to have forgotten her, Becky rose and slid quietly from the room.

In the hall she hesitated for a moment, looking again at the painted Wynnes upon the wall: thin-featured, delicately insolent, their faded faces veiled in shadow. To cease, in time, to care so much . . . that was the secret of their remoteness. . . . The idea stirred her like the glimpse of a star, caught for a moment in a mirror: lovely, unattainable—cold. To glimpse it, to be so stirred, was enough for her; it was the thrill, not the star that she desired. She must have warmer playthings. . . . But it was something, surely, that she never had mistaken tinsel for starlight. So, with an obscure sense of triumph, as though she had won a wordless argument, she moved slowly toward the garden.

A Captain Out of Etruria

By

A. R. Leach

LUCY ANDERSON, as Lucy Anderson, with no eulogies or criticism attached to her name, proved at the time of this story that she, thirty-six years old, was not always perched aloft in the ivory tower of her art. She had been living in Europe since the War, moving freely in that agreeable society of compatriots and their foreign acquaintance which is so much envied by readers of the Paris *Herald*.

Miss Anderson, however, was not as these. She was painting, surreptitiously as it were. She had a small but sufficient income which, in francs, went a considerable distance beyond its capacity in dollars, and she had her banker uncle as a refuge and a background.

She worked constantly wherever she was, because she never looked into a face without seeing the problem it held for her—without wishing to take what struck her consciousness as its salient feature, and translate it, bring it into a harmony which would vibrate into the consciousness of humanity. She created (as the critics have taught us in these last few years) by the stroke of a brush, by the juxtaposition of colors, a sensation, an outthrust statement which a poet puts into meter, a musician into harmonies.

As Miss Anderson had no conversation about art, had never even learned its patter, she was not taken seriously even by her friends. She talked about anything, making her-

self so generally agreeable that there are old ladies of both sexes still hanging about who insist, with dark hints, that she employed some "real artist" who painted "those pictures," or at least "finished" them. "There was that portrait of Mrs. Burt, the one she behaved over so badly. Mrs. Burt, just out of good nature, and of course expecting she would give her the sketch or whatever it was, sat for days being painted; and when she saw the result it was a perfect daub. The loveliest frame ever fashioned couldn't have made it possible to hang on a wall. Mrs. Burt said she wouldn't have taken the thing home; and Lucy Anderson had the impertinence to sell it!—if you please, to the French government!"

But these were the days when Lucy was still a dear nice girl, Robert Anderson's niece and one of Paris' social fluxes. It was the season she painted the old woman shearing her dog on the river bank, the gray light on the Seine making sinister the cutting shears, the rebellious dog, and the cruel old woman. It was the first picture the critics were to see and gloat over, but the time had not arrived for opening the storehouse of wonders she had ready for them; and it is doubtful if it would have come in her lifetime had it not been for that autumn in Italy when her road turned.

It was at tea time in the garden of the largest hotel in Geneva, after the horse chestnuts had dropped their bloom in Paris, that Miss Anderson personally encountered Mrs. James T. Clevering and her pretty, slim daughter. When Miss Anderson saw them they were sitting at a table in the center of the chattering crowd, making a great show of talk and amusement, which did not disguise the fact that they were entirely alone. Miss Anderson, who took a very sane and human interest in gossip, of which she heard a great

deal, had seen the Cleverings in Paris and had heard more than she had seen. The Cleverings had been very well advertised by the two little newspapers printed in English which exist for that purpose, and at the time Emelie Clevering was presented to the English Court, her dress (with the name of the Parisian maker) had been described and photographed and she had been placed in the gallery of international publicity. After that, gossip said, the mother and daughter had been bewildered. The presentation had been arranged for them long before, as long before as the time when Mr. Clevering had so generously contributed to a presidential campaign.

The pair first came into Miss Anderson's vision one day at the Pré Catalan when the band played and motors drew up to discharge the notables and those who came to look at them. The sweet Paris air was vibrating with the American music, the flash and color and small talk of a holiday gathering, when the Cleverings came in: happy in the company of a dark lady and one of the dyed-haired Grand Dukes who have made a profession of escape.

Kind Americans looked at the group with consternation. "Look at the poor things," Miss Anderson's hostess said over her cup. "Lucy, you haven't anything to do, why don't you write a social Baedeker? How can they know that they are in notorious society? They say that after the girl was presented they sat in their hotel and expected the Queen to ask them to dinner. I am not at all certain they did not invite her."

"Who are they anyway?" old Mrs. Varick asked, after everything had been laboriously repeated into her trumpet. Mrs. Black shook her head as though it were too dreadful to repeat. In reality, she told Lucy, the Cleverings were ordinary simple rich people who were said to be deadly dull.

Miss Anderson thought that that might not be an insuperable barrier to association with royalty, but like a good many other thoughts whose edge might have cut the delicate frosting of her niceness, it was unexpressed.

"The girl," she said, "is rather a type." But that remark met with the inattention given to all conventional remarks.

Lucy Anderson began to make a picture of Emelie—the fresh-faced, blank-eyed young creature, so certainly unsophisticated in spite of her truly amazing clothes, her saucy hat, her knowing shoes. These were so plainly mere decorations laid on from the outside without any reference to the inner structure of taste. She was a ready-made problem for the artist.

"The second generation: the first has climbed out of its environment exactly as an earthworm climbs, and the second has no instinct to fit. It squirms. I must get her on canvas some day."

As the days went on and she saw more of the mother and daughter, she began to visualize them as distracted travelers caught in one of those old-fashioned mazes which the practical humor of an earlier time planted in gardens. The pavilion where the society they coveted disported itself with music and laughter was somewhere at the end of one of those paths, but when they rushed at the next turning—or rather the mother rushed, passive daughter in hand—they always found themselves in another blind alley.

When, on that idle afternoon in Geneva, Lucy Anderson saw them again she could not know that they were recovering from one of these false turnings, against whose blocking hedge they had flung themselves with such momentum that its thorns had left them smarting. The first days of their stay in London they had met an American citizen at the American Embassy, where he had come to pay his respects

to the representative of the country under whose protection he lived while he roamed the world with the free conscience of a man who had done his whole duty to his country by fighting for her. Mrs. Clevering, misled by the sweetness of his manner, had confided in him as a compatriot and a brother. He had been charm itself; too charming, in his facile dexterous ease, for Mrs. Clevering's comprehension.

Emelie had basked in his gentle questionings. It had been a matter of angry puzzlement on the mother's part that men did not "flock" about Emelie. They had come abroad expecting to be beset, warned against the titled adventurer who would try to marry a beauty and an heiress, but they had had to make no rebuffs. So when Bertram Lossing had given them an hour of delight (the light talk, the gay assumption that they, too, were part of all this rushing to and fro, this steady brilliance in the midst of furious activity which was the London season) they felt that for this they had come to London.

Lossing was innocent of any wish to impress them. His thirty-eight years had only perfected his face, and every one of them had laid a softer patina on his manners. Poor little Emelie, unaccustomed to anything that he represented, turned him into one of the heroes who live in the mists of a young girl's fancy.

When they parted Mrs. Clevering took a card from the gold case with the diamond monogram that she habitually carried in her hand and gave it to him; and while he held it delicately and put it away carefully, she effusively begged him to come to tea. "We have our own parlor at the Ritz," she told him, "and we have tea every day at five o'clock." When he did not come they speculated over it, and Emelie was certain it was on account of an accident. If they had known his address they would have sent him a more formal

invitation or, as Emelie felt sure that he was ill, possibly they would have sent flowers.

Then, when an opportunity came, they asked about him at the Embassy and were a little excited to learn that he more than fulfilled their dreams. He had a great villa on Lake Como which he called home, where he entertained his many friends. Everything added to their satisfaction in him. He would "do." And then they had gone to Paris and met his sister-in-law at—of all places—their jeweler's shop. Mrs. Clevering, over the counter where each was buying lavishly, hesitatingly mentioned to the rather spectacular lady beside her that she had accidentally heard her name spoken, and that they knew her brother-in-law. "We met him in London at our Embassy," Mrs. Clevering said in the assured voice of one who offers a perfect reference. Mrs. Digby-Lossing turned and looked at her speculatively.

"Oh! Bertram," carelessly, "he goes all over the shop." They walked to the edge of the Avenue de L'Opéra together where the two smart motors stood. Mrs. Digby-Lossing, tall, dark, flashing, drawing all eyes, hesitated a moment and then, "Since you are friends of my brother-in-law, my *dear* brother-in-law" (any note of sarcasm was lost on the Cleverings) "why not come to Paillard's to tea with me?" They had gone, and the next day the jeweler found occasion to call at their hotel on some ostensible errand concerning settings, and took the opportunity to tell them that Mrs. Digby-Lossing had been too conspicuous a figure in Paris before a young war-sick fool had married her.

The Parisian tradesman who had heard of the tea at Paillard's felt that he could not have his shop come into bad social repute, but he shrugged his shoulders over the density of his wealthy customers. He had mentioned that Mr. Bernard Lossing was a favorite in France, particularly in

the old legitimist families. Mrs. Clevering had said laughingly that she "didn't quite know what a legitimist was, but it sounded exclusive."

Then the Cleverings turned their bewildered backs on that path and were pacing between the rows in Geneva when Miss Anderson went by and smiled. Mrs. Clevering had no idea who Lucy Anderson might be (as that social arbiter, the Paris *Herald,* never mentioned her name), but she had seen her many times between the columns of the pavilion at the end of their social labyrinth, and when she walked by their table, smiling and hesitating, her gentle distinction so flattering, Mrs. Clevering—not quite as readily as she would have done in May, her cordial instincts a little hampered by experience—with some of the shrinking of the burnt child rose and greeted her.

Miss Anderson, with the boldness of the hunter who means to run down his prey without any reference to the game laws, murmured many politenesses and hoped that they were enjoying Geneva, although everybody seemed to find it a dull season.

"I suppose you came down with Mrs. Colmar" (mentioning the name of the wife of an American Secretary in Paris) ; "I have not seen you since the day of her reception," she added. Miss Anderson did not mention that she had not seen her that day but had heard one of those vociferous ladies, who pay their social way by giving amusing caricatures of all the people not present at the time, describe their costumes and entrance and exit at the patriotic gathering.

Presently she was sitting at the Cleverings' abundant table, making herself as agreeable as she knew how, and that was very agreeable indeed—bowing to her friends as they went by, and altogether giving the Cleverings the comfortable feeling of shelter from the cold world. That night at dinner

in one of the villas near by, Bertram Lossing sat beside Miss Anderson—and then and there began one of those episodes which later was to add to the world's store of masterpieces.

Lucy and Lossing had met several times, but never had the cement of a mutual interest held them together for even a moment. To-night, after the two courses whose passing each felt it necessary to devote to the other side, they turned toward each other with animation. Lossing's high-nosed keen face was full of interest as he looked into Lucy's long, bright-brown eyes which shone like lamps behind the solidly carven olive features.

"I saw you having tea with some of our compatriots to-day," he said.

"I enjoyed meeting them very much," Miss Anderson replied.

"I am very sure you did," he said quickly. He would have been equally sympathetic to the vociferous chronicler of the doings of the Cleverings, but he found Miss Anderson's attitude more to his taste.

"I met them in London one afternoon when we were both calling at the Embassy." He made no attempt to keep the light note of amusement out of his voice. "I have never forgotten them."

"You should visit America some time," Miss Anderson said blandly, and put her fork into the *langouste mousse* on her plate with the interest of one who is in the years when food is food, after youth scorns and before age rejects.

Mr. Lossing smiled. He knew how to meet that remark. "I have been there," he said, "but—the 'Dollar Princesses,' as I believe they call them—were not so prominent as they appear to be now."

"To tell the truth, they are not so prominent in America

as they are in Europe. But these people are not prominent, or rather important, anywhere—yet."

"Why 'yet'? Do they interest you so much?"

"The girl—enormously."

"Shall you take her about with you?"

"I am about to ask that privilege."

The impatient old French general on the other side of Miss Anderson claimed her again and they were getting into the salad when Lossing was able to go on. He began as though there had been no interval:

"Why, may I be pardoned for asking?"

Miss Anderson hesitated. She knew that if Lossing had ever heard that she painted portraits, or anything else, the fact had certainly not been impressed on his consciousness as a matter of consequence. He, with his intimate little collection of early Italian art—where every bit was a treasure at whose mention even dealers lowered their voices—would hardly remember an amateur, and it amused her to play with his state of mind and her own.

"I find her a stimulus," she said. "She gives me great thoughts."

"A stimulus? In what direction, pray?"

"Art," said Miss Anderson.

Lossing half turned on his chair in his real astonishment. "She—I had no idea that she knew anything about art. They—I am sorry to say that I was so obtuse. I like to think . . ." He hesitated.

"You like to think," Miss Anderson said, "that you are so accustomed to being let past the portals, as one might say, that you believe that you can inventory one's mental furnishings at the first glance and make up your mind whether it is worth while to come again."

Lossing looked at her helplessly and then smiled his in-

comparable smile: "At any rate, it is not often that I find a companion on my explorations," he said. "It is delightful to hear of secret rooms."

"I doubt if you talked to the girl at all." Lucy knew that if he had, he was amusing himself entirely after her fashion.

"I am certain I did not. The remarkable mother talked to me. She told me that her father was the first Judge of the County Court somewhere."

"A most respectable ancestry," Miss Anderson said gravely, and they both smiled.

Later, when they spoke again in the drawing-room that overlooked the lake where little boats with gay lanterns on their bows were still passing, Lossing said:

"I think I was bewildered by the young lady's remarkably beautiful costume. She was—she reminded me—perhaps she did not remind me then, but she does now as I recall her—of a little white villa lost in very ornamental grounds. There were so many parterres to admire, so many jeweled fountains playing that perhaps I never reached the living apartments at all."

Miss Anderson's long eyes were lighted. "Exactly," she said.

When she reached home that night she put herself into the voluminous red robe diapered in gold, which Fortuny had made for her in Venice the year before, that satisfied the gorgeousness she repressed daily. She opened the glass doors to her balcony which her French maid had so carefully closed against the night air of the lake, and sat for a long time looking across the water toward the place where Mont Blanc sometimes lifts her icy shoulder through the clear air; and she was filled with a vast content. It is the most delightful of experiences to find a companion who travels

your road and sees what you see, and a rare one when he sees as much as Lucy Anderson sees.

The next afternoon when Miss Anderson returned from her walk she found the foreign-looking bit of pasteboard on which Mr. Bertram Lossing's name was engraved. She was half glad and half sorry. At thirty-six one has grown to distrust the vision of the night. She threw the card into the china bowl by her door and went about making the composition for the portrait of Emelie Clevering that was possessing her thoughts.

Evidently Lossing had no intention of losing what he had found, for the next day brought an invitation to dine with him; and she discovered, when she arrived at the villa he was sharing with a friend on whose account he had come to Geneva, that the company was, in a manner, assembled about her own personality.

"I almost invited your friends—only . . ."

"Her mother doesn't talk as much as she did earlier in the season, I am told," Lucy said, and Lossing gazed at her with the fascinated delight we give to a mind reader.

The portrait was not so easy to arrive at as Miss Anderson had expected. Taken about by Miss Anderson in the easy summer groups—the tennis-playing, dancing, passing crowd—the Cleverings began to have "a really good time"; and there was no propitious moment for a suggestion of painting Emelie's portrait.

Lossing and Miss Anderson were building a friendship as a coral island is made, by infinitesimal particles, and as it put its branches ever nearer the surface there came to at least one of them a fear of an unknown thing. If it were true that they were making each other into a habit—weaving that unbreakable tie, a dependent congeniality—Lucy at least

knew that neither would remain as before. The precious individuality which each cherished would change by a process as subtle as the structural changes of chemistry to become, in a way, a part of the other. And while Lucy revolted, struggled against the change, she feared to look too closely at Lossing lest she should find him in the same struggle against what was, after all, to their sort a variety of personal death. And then a chance hand touched the kaleidoscope of their days and whirled the bits into a new pattern.

The old Duchessa of Valadino wrote to Lucy and asked her to take her apartment in Florence for three autumn months. The Duchessa had, she wrote her "dear young friend," two or three servants, her cockatoos, and her tapestries, as well as the plants she hoped to keep through the winter; and it was very expensive to pay for the care of all of these. Would Lucy come and live in the apartment and pay the bills while she went visiting? Nobody had any money now except Americans.

Miss Anderson went to see the Cleverings and asked if she could have Emelie for the autumn. She was careful to tell Mrs. Clevering that the apartment on the Lung' Arno was a Duchessa's apartment, and she said nothing at all about a portrait.

So, after Emelie had dutifully looked at Juliet's tomb in Verona, and added her visiting card to the heap of yellowing pasteboard that lies where the guides tell you the Flower of Verona fell to dust, and fed the pigeons and bought twisted glass in Venice, and forgotten all about the Titians in her naïve appreciation of Favai's gondolas silhouetted against moonlit palaces—October saw them established in the great old apartment with its balconies and stone floors where the Duchessa, her hands in thick woolen gloves, sniffingly drank *tisane* on winter afternoons. And then Miss Anderson put

out the iron hand and began to work on the canvas to which all this was the preliminary. She had put Bertram Lossing back in the last corner of her consciousness. "There are a number of things there that I have forgotten," she told herself, with the naïveté of twenty.

The portrait "went" beautifully. It had been in the artist's mind so long that her facile hands put it on canvas as one writes a line that has been singing itself in one's ears with every cadence echoing true. That Emelie thought it nonsense and was more than sulky over taking the time from teas and lace shops, the more-or-less modern antiques, and the more-or-less perfect pearls of the Ponte Vecchio was no drawback to Miss Anderson's work. In some subtle way, all of that went into the inconsequent nothingness of the fresh-colored transparent little face with the fair hair above it, in its setting of garments for whose inspiration designers had sacked galleries. The picture was a series of beautiful harmonies, accented, broken into by the incongruities, the discords. Lucy Anderson was a great painter, as we all know now.

There came a stage in Miss Anderson's pictures where she let the sitter go. The last touches, the sweep of her own personality that she left on her canvases she put in bit by bit as the feeling for them came to her. The thing at which she looked was her motif, her theme. That they seldom saw their finished portraits was one reason why the sitters left them in her hands so lightly.

And now Emelie was generously given her reward in a perfect riot of little pleasures which she could understand. She was really sweet and gentle when she was happy, and her fondness for Miss Anderson sometimes gave that translator of life the feeling that a vivisector must have when a doomed puppy licks his hand.

It was the day when Miss Anderson—from Emelie's point of view—gave up a bad job and turned a failure to the wall, that Bertram Lossing arrived in Florence as a guest in a villa on a hill. He was one of a very sophisticated company of English who had come together to comfort a very beautiful lady who was in deep mourning for an exalted friend whose name was never mentioned.

But the instant Lucy Anderson met Lossing, on the Lung' Arno one windy day when the afterglow was sending its first sheets of red gold over the river, she knew why he had come. And that thing she had hidden and bade herself forget burst its locks and walked blithely out into the open. She knew, and knowing she drew a long sigh of vast content. She even forgot her picture for a little while.

Lossing walked home with her and, halfway, led her on to one of the bridges where they stopped and looked up toward the hills, soft against the glory in the sky. The wind was dying with the setting sun and the rush of the water sang its scale over and over, while Lossing smiled at her as ingenuously as though they were twenty.

There had been few times in Lucy Anderson's life when the sense of humor entirely deserted her, and now with the flush of pleasure on her face she recalled in spite of herself that it had been at least a dozen years since any man had paid her the compliment of following her from one city to another. The last one had been a ridiculous widower whom she had likened to a bawling, skirt-catching child who had lost his nurse, and was deceived by her kind hesitations as to whether or not she could attempt a subject that would have delighted Franz Hals.

Recalling this, she had something of a thrill in realizing that she could never think of painting Lossing. He satisfied her supremely as he was.

"And I hear that you have little Miss Clevering with you."

"Yes, I have." She wondered how soon she could tell him why. She was going to rid herself of the girl presently, and she had a warm delight in the certainty that here was someone she could take past her reception room to the utmost confines of her domain. It would be one of her great moments when she could show him the portrait which was so perfectly the white dwelling place of a little incoherent spirit lost in its surroundings.

"I have thought many times of what you told me of the girl, and I am glad that she is here. It will interest me very much to see what you have found in her."

"I am certain it will interest you." Miss Anderson's long eyes gleamed. The wind had only added to her trimness, her fine dark face was looking its best, and she was glad of it; but beyond the moment she saw him coming back to her, after his explorations into the barren place that was Emelie's mind, to express his bewilderment. She saw herself dramatically—every woman makes a theatrical heroine of herself at times (whatever may die, that never does while she has strength for bare living)—showing him the all-explaining portrait. How much of it would be a feline triumph over a younger, prettier woman, and how much a delight in Lossing's nearness to herself, Miss Anderson's conscience was not morbid enough to ask.

She rejoiced single-hearted over the precious friend who could understand. She knew, because it is the gift of genius to know, what her work represented. She knew that when she was ready to send it forth finished, the criticism of authority would be the criticism she herself gave it; but here was one who had given her the assurance that he saw her point of departure.

She took him home to tea in the Duchessa's long-win-

dowed salon. They found Emelie, exquisite as always, rather sulkily awaiting tea and cross that no one had come. She resented the tea guests being so entirely Miss Anderson's friends. She had been "in things" long enough to begin to make claims.

The girl's slender young figure was silhouetted half against the long pink-and-green striped curtains which the Duchessa was wont to show as the hangings of the room in which her great-grandfather had strangled her great-grandmother, her pale embroidered crêpe frock very effective against the background of yellow river and striped silk. She turned at their entrance, and to Miss Anderson's surprise she flushed a brilliant rose when she saw Lossing and her face was tremulous with embarrassed smiles.

Lossing took her hand—not a very small nor delicate hand —with all the gentle reassuring charm in which he was so perfect, and sat down to talk to her while Miss Anderson busied herself with the Duchessa's heavy cups behind the branched candlesticks of the tea table.

"If you are able to support this—*tazza*—" she said to Lossing as she handed him the lumpy piece of imitation Capo da Monte with which the Duchessa had replaced her priceless treasures, serenely certain that "the Americans" would never know the difference. Lossing took the cup with a vague smile and went on listening to Emelie's halting recital of the joys of Florence.

"And the Pitti and Uffizi? I suppose you visit them every day."

"Not every day—" Emilie hesitated. "Some of the pictures are lovely, but some I find dreadful."

"So do I."

"Some I could look at forever."

Miss Anderson held her own cup poised to hear Emelie's

oft-repeated views on "the baby," as she called the holy child of Raphael's depicting, and the "splendid" copy she was having made. Unfortunately at that moment a group of English girls came in and Emelie's art views waited.

They saw Lossing every day after this. The grief of the beautiful lady appeared to be assuaged in bridge and the winning of large sums, and Mr. Lossing left his friends to their fate and went quite happily about in the easy Florentine autumn society which was then at its high tide.

"I am beginning to see where you find the spring of inspiration in your young friend," he said one day. Lucy waited, with the anticipation with which she met all his beginnings.

"You may remember that one of those ladies who fled the plague in the year 1348 to make themselves 'innocently merry' in the meadows over yonder was named Emilia."

Lucy Anderson laughed.

"I cannot think of our Emelie providing Boccaccio with one of his tales."

"Why not? Boccaccio provided the tale. All he asked was the object on which to hang it. 'Our Emelie,' as you call her, would look in perfect keeping in a pearl net and a brocade robe, sitting on the green grass with that company. She might even have the gown now."

And Lucy Anderson gave one of her rare flushes. She felt that it was not necessary to show him that portrait; in some way he understood.

"There is some trace of the belated paganism of that time in her face," he continued, playing with the fancy.

"Remember the Judge," Lucy laughed.

"It is really an unawakened look," he went on.

"The sleeping beauty you mean, waiting to be awakened."

"Perhaps."

"Do awaken her!" Lucy happily jeered. "It should be interesting to hear her awakening cries."

Emelie had not talked to Lossing as much as he had hoped. As she realized him as a figure in the world around them, a world which filled her with respect, whose thinness she was incapable of seeing, her awe of him grew. She was much more impressed by his fluent Italian and French than by anything he could say in English: indeed, her lack of comprehension was almost as complete in one language as the other.

Her decorative, or decorated stillness grew complete, and there crept into the blank face a shadow—a shadow which Miss Anderson failed to see, a shadow that she would have doubtless refused to see because it would have meant the ruin of the glowing picture in the stone room behind her bedroom.

And the days moved on to their climax, as days are always moving to end something. Life carries a serial story for every one of us, and what we see as we go by is only the beginnings and the endings of her old, old plots tricked out in new accouterments.

One day at a Florentine house where the walls of the reception room were lively with old prints, Miss Anderson and Lossing, going over them, found a little old eighteenth-century print of the fair at Impruneta. The date hidden among the scrolls on the margin was that of the next day.

"I wonder if they still hold that festival," Lossing said.

Their host, so long tired of prints that he looked at them only as milestones on his journey into knowledge of Italian things, put up a languid glass to the yellowing old sheet where gentlemen in full coats and wigs elegantly composed themselves in a *piazza* before a little church. In his heart he thought Miss Anderson must be a very stupid woman

when Lossing talked to her about the subject of a print. But he knew Tuscany.

"Impruneta is exactly like that now, and the little church still has its Della Robbia—and the peasants still have the fair—yes."

Miss Anderson was about to ask if there existed any reason for looking at the Della Robbia on the fair day, when Mrs. Dunallen, the Scotch woman who missed nothing—least of all any possibility of an "excursion"—had gathered the very young of the company by what Miss Anderson called her war-cry, and with Emelie wistfully in the midst of the questioning they found themselves committed to the fair at Impruneta.

Lucy Anderson never forgot that golden October morning. She put it away in the dark room from which Lossing had broken his way, but it has never lost its detail nor its vivid surfaces.

They took an old-fashioned barouche with two strong horses for the hill climbing, driven by a young Italian with the face of a Roman senator above the stiff collar of a livery left behind by some traveling milord of a long-past day. His gravity lent it a dignity which made it seem a new fashion instead of an old one. Emelie, in the smartest of tight Parisian walking costumes and a close hat, sat beside Miss Anderson; while facing them, Lossing talked gay nonsense.

They went up the hills and down the dales of Tuscany, beyond the line of the ancient walls; past the dusty green olive orchards where the old trees, like quarrelsome humans, split and writhed away from what had once been their common heart; past the smoky fields where great cream-colored oxen took their stately way unconscious of the inadequate plow that dragged behind them; through vineyards whose red and russet vines were losing the last of their

grapes under the brown fingers of boys and girls clothed in the soft colors that use had given what was once their garish holiday dress.

To Lucy Anderson, exquisitely tuned to every impression, they rode through the land of romance—her romance. She was tender in her happiness. She was tender to poor little Emelie sitting quiet under her cuplike hat. She forgot that impressions were things to be recorded. The essence of the day was color, sun, glancing light, an atmosphere, a setting for life that she herself was living. She was drinking her wine, not pressing it into casks to be put away in storehouses.

They were the last to reach the village of Impruneta, and when they came down the hill to the *piazza* they were met by the indignant people from the forward carriages exclaiming over the horrors of the most sordid of ugly peasant fairs: a thing of cheap jacks, ready-made clothing to disfigure the peasants, chickens and calves, and not even a decent glass of wine or a place to drink it. The restaurants were foul. There was nothing to do but look at the Della Robbia, and there were "dozens better in Florence," and then go back somewhere for food, Mrs. Dunallen angrily told them.

They were surrounded when they left the carriage and it was only Miss Anderson who saw that Emelie was hanging back.

"I think that I shall not try to cross that crowded place," she said; "my head aches. I think I shall sit in the carriage until you come back."

"I am sorry," Miss Anderson said, and told the driver to wait. She crossed the square—tall, strong, dominant as she had never been in her life before, but as she would always be in the future. The earth force which had been drawn up through her blood and nerves had awakened to

life that strong thing on which the spirit lives, and while she lives it will live with her.

Emelie looked at them going away with a hurt self-pity. She felt miserably unhappy. How did people learn all the things they talked about? How could they read all the dull books after they had spent years and years learning the languages in which they were written? What made the difference between the thing they laughed at and the thing they discussed with enthusiasm? She would have felt as though she were still in that maze if she had been capable of visualizing the maze.

"He is just kind to me. He just talks to me"—"He" covering her horizon. "I shall go back to mother, I guess," she thought miserably.

A vagrant memory possessed her mind. Back there in the United States when they were planning their "trip," that "trip" which had spun out in their vision as a vista of following delights, her mother had said that they must buy a "souvenir" of every place they visited. She luxuriated now in the misery of buying a reminder of what she felt was the most miserable day of her life.

Down beside the carriage sat a brown old woman eating roasted chestnuts from a withered claw of a hand. On the ground were set out some pieces of coarse pottery, and dotted here and there among them were rude little pottery figures of men on horseback, the horses with square stiff legs.

Emelie knew how to ask the cost of things in three languages; and now she lifted the nearest of the little figures with her timid *"Quanto costa?"*

The old woman rose hastily with floods of talk, gathering up bowls and plates and trying to press them into the girl's arms, running a horny finger round the rude decoration, ringing the bottoms with a snapping of thumbs. Emelie

backed away, repeating her one question. Finally she bought one of the tiny horsemen for the lira which was twenty times its price. With it held tightly in her suede palm she climbed into the barouche and sat for the half hour Miss Anderson and Lossing gave to the church.

Lucy Anderson had passed many a miracle-working madonna and she was almost self-conscious as she put a piece of money into the box and lighted a candle in the dull little Impruneta church. She formulated no prayer. She was giving thanks that she had no prayer. Life was full of satisfactions.

They drifted back to the carriages, and Emelie, missed for the first time, listened to polite regrets with a droop to her pretty pink mouth that was too pathetic for the self-pity it expressed. She sat silent, looking blankly, unseeing over the visions of old arranged beauty that ages had created.

They stopped at a wayside garden inn and ate *frittura* and half-dried figs while vine leaves fluttered into their plates. Lossing sat beside Emelie, and when she set the rude little figure of the horseman on the checked cloth, he took it in his fingers and turned it round in the sun. "What is this?"

"I—bought it in the square," she said, flushing. "It is nothing; I thought—"

"A captain out of Etruria," he said and ran his forefinger down the curve that made a swagger in the tiny back, just as the peasant woman had marked the coarse green daubs on her plate.

"What is it?" Mrs. Dunallen asked crossly. "Do you mean to say there was something of value in that place after all?"

"That depends upon what you call valuable," Lossing said. "Miss Clevering appears to have the eye to see the characteristic thing while we are wasting our time on the banal. These little figures have doubtless been sold at that fair

ever since it was a fair. The helmet of the captain is Etruscan. See the gallant poise of him! The mold has probably been recast a hundred times, and it is a poor thing now: but he rode out of Etruria."

The respect on all their faces was balm to the sore spirit of the girl. Tears came into her eyes and she held her face shaded under the cup hat so that they might not be seen. The trained conscience that would suggest a denial of taste or knowledge in buying the figure, which would tell that it was an accident, was as far from the girl's comprehension as the taste with which they were crediting her. In that at least she was surely pagan. But then, Nature is pagan.

They rode home in the blue smoke of the late afternoon, and the afterglow was again on the bland slow river, darkness coming furtively in the shadows of the palaces and churches, lurking like some storied forgotten thing in the narrow streets as they left their carriage.

The Duchessa's butler begged Miss Anderson to come into the recesses of the apartment where the telephone was in hiding, to answer an insistent call, and Lossing went up the stone stairs with Emelie. They turned into the great bare salon: dusky, smelling of the years. The girl took her close hat from her head with petulant twists and threw it on a couch. In the light from outside Lossing saw the tears on her white cheeks. He doesn't know—although he thinks he does; and she doesn't know, because all life is a mystery to her, as it must be to anything that Nature moves by instincts in primal ways—*why* or *how*—but there was a murmur, "My poor child!" and Emelie was sighing long sobbing sighs against Lossing's tweed coat.

Miss Anderson found them—and at the sight of her tall figure, her face white in the gloom, Emelie ran away leaving

Lossing to explain. What he astonishingly said was, "How good you have been to us!"

He thanked her again, holding her strong hand. It was she, he told her, who had shown him the crystal depths of Emelie's beautiful nature. He had been blind at first. He had looked at her again, and then had confidently followed the sweet attractiveness of the dear girl when he saw that "my friend," as he called Miss Anderson with some emotion, had chosen Emelie to live with her, to be her constant companion.

How beautiful, how wonderful Emelie was! How unerring her feeling, her taste! He held out the figure of the Etruscan captain as proof of the last: "I shall keep it all my life."

The cut went so deep that it momentarily severed Lucy Anderson's sense of humor. It may be that it never rose again in its former brilliant strength. She had no inclination to twist her lip in the faintest smile, although she saw the situation in all its sharp contrasts. We are continually giving Nature credit for a sense of humor, because the devil has given it to us to divert us from our purposes and compensate us for their loss. Nature goes to the end of her road and cares not at all for the vehicle which carries her there.

Lucy did not jeer at herself then; that came later. Now she said, with sympathy, the word that fixed Lossing in supreme masculine satisfaction. She knew that he never would know, what all his world would smile over, that here was an old formula working: a man of thirty-eight who had become as simple as any Adam under the glance of a young pretty girl who had fallen in love with him. That she was stupid and incredible to his world was a mere detail.

It was Nature's everyday trick that is ever presented with new scenery.

That night after the apartment was still, like a Renaissance conspirator in her red-and-gold gown Miss Anderson took a branched silver candlestick from the Duchessa's dressing table and went as one reluctant into the stone room where Emelie's portrait stood on its easel. The picture was a brilliant thing. It was her child; not her only child but her youngest child. Into it was painted more than poor trifling Emelie in her trappings—more than she, its creator, had in herself: it was a work of art.

Lucy Anderson looked at her work for a long time.

And gradually, as delicately, as inevitably as a chemical reaction it worked its magic. The vibrations that had shaken her, that had brought her here carrying the banal purpose of a hurt woman who had the immemorial impulse of sacrifice, died. The pulse of creation throbbed unobstructed through her at last. She tapped the pool of understanding.

The strong right hand of the artist went against her mouth and then into the air with a high gesture.

"God! It is good!" she said.

THE DISCIPLE

By

Conrad Aiken

FOUR o'clock struck in the church tower he was passing; the wide bronze rings of sound fell over him mingled with a fine powdery snow. He looked at his watch—how absurd!—and found that the church was quite right. This seemed the last straw in his boredom, and, as if instigated by it, he turned out of the quiet square, beginning to be patched with white under dim lamps, with here and there a black wheel-track showing, and moved listlessly toward the shopping district.

"Why didn't I go?" he thought, without more than waving the vaguest of hands toward the imaginary destination or destiny. Then, "Middle age is a slow crucifixion." And then again, knocking snow from his coat, "I can't stand this damned solitude much longer."

However, here were the shop windows, a long gaudily jeweled row of them, pouring their colored lights across the snowy pavement and illuminating brilliantly the hordes of feverishly gesticulating pedestrians, the prowling taxis, the furtively creeping beetlelike limousines, the wet sides of horses. He went slowly, like a heavy moth, from window to window. He pulled his mustache, he stared, stamped his feet, devoured with dry eyes all that he saw: opal necklaces, gold cigarette-cases, umbrellas with carved ivory handles, embroideries of Chinese scarlet, opera glasses, microscopes.

Good God! what a strange collection. He felt as if he were somehow incrusting his soul with these things—he seemed to himself to be like one of these singular boxes known to his childhood, covered all over, hard, rough, and coruscating, with small sea shells. Yes, exactly, and the box itself empty. Sea shells—sea shells. He thought with great pleasure of sea shells, and then of the sea, the twilight valley floors of the sea, the strange soft trees that grow there, and himself as somehow a denizen—what precisely? A tortoise incrusted with barnacles, indistinguishable from his bed of shells, immemorially old and white. Yes, something like that. . . .

"I should like," he said to the florid Jewish shopkeeper, "to look at some oddity in the way of a set of chessmen."

"An oddity? . . . Yes."

"A wedding gift, under peculiar circumstances. Something rather—" he waved a claw.

"Rare?"

"Old."

A Chinese set with dragons, a Hindu set with elephants, a Japanese set of carved cherrywood, daimyos, priests. . . . No, these weren't quite the thing. The Jew looked at him intently under wrinkled lids like a parrot's. Was his tongue, also, as hard and dry and old as a parrot's? . . . The Jew hunched his shoulders almost up to his ears.

"Ah, I think I know what you want. But it can't be had."

"You mean . . ."

"You were thinking, no doubt, of the set of the 'Twelve Disciples'?"

Astonishing! He had never heard of the set of the "Twelve Disciples," and yet there could be no question that it was what he was seeking.

"Exactly!"

"Ah! But it is lost. . . . And even if it were found, who could afford to buy it?"

"Oh! Afford! . . ."

"Ah—you are right—what does it matter?"

"And what is it like, this set of the Twelve Disciples?"

"Like? It is—but don't you know?"

The Jew, leaning on the glass case, peered at him, he thought, somewhat peculiarly.

"How should I? I've never even heard of it."

"But you said—!"

"Ah—forgive me—it is true that when you mentioned it . . . how shall I say? . . . it seemed to me in some remote way—familiar. That was all."

"Ah! I see—I see! You thought you remembered it. And if you think, if you concentrate upon it—if you turn, in your mind, a sudden light upon it . . ."

"I *beg* your pardon?"

"You don't see it any more clearly?"

"Why, no,—how should I?"

"Oh . . . But the set really is quite ordinary—as carving. Nothing remarkable."

"Then why is it so valuable?"

"Perhaps because it is generally considered mythical."

"Mythical? It doesn't, after all, exist?"

"So some would say. As for me—"

"You believe in it?"

"I believe in it. . . . I have even, in dreams, seen it."

He found himself staring at the Jew, on this, as if at the revelation of some sort of obscure miracle. Yes, it appeared, the set of chessmen, in dreams; it came, in dreams, to this Jew. For a moment it seemed, in the oddest of ways, more tangible; it gave out a gleam and came nearer. Thirty-

two pieces of ivory, close-clustered, one of them fallen over, and a candle lighting them. Had he dreamed this himself? It was vivid, and vivid was the hand he put out among them to right the fallen piece. But the fallen piece was stubborn, resisted, became massive. . . . He lifted his hand from the glass show case and stepped back. He had a sense of having resisted, barely resisted, and with an effort that left him trembling, a temptation not the less vast for having been incomprehensible. It was with a feeling of yielding to some obscure small issue of this temptation that he now said, with a conscious jocoseness which did not conceal excitement:

"And the piece that has fallen over—which piece is that?"

The effect of this remark was extraordinary. The tempo of the adventure—for adventure it unquestionably and profoundly was—instantly quickened. It was as if the stream on which they were being swept had not only broadened and taken on a dizzying speed, but had as suddenly dived underground through a phantasmagoric darkness. Specifically, he found himself looking at a Jew who had somehow changed; he was less the shopkeeper, less even the human being, and more—something else. What, exactly? More imposing? That certainly, and also, singularly, more luminous—he gave out in the general darkness a light, and his eyes, looking down, seemed in the kindliest of manners to indicate that this light must be also a guidance. What it was that the Jew said he didn't catch. It was merely a short, vague exclamation, followed by a smile and a stare which were a little frightening in their suggestion of extraordinary intimacy. After that it was as if every step taken was taken the more elaborately to insure for the ensuing talk the right seclusion and secrecy. The iron shutters outside the window were rattled harshly down and locked, the door was locked,

the lights in the show window were switched off, leaving the heap of jewels, oddities, silks, and carvings in darkness. From outside in the night, mingled with the subdued murmur of the street, came, even more subdued and tenuous, sounds of a bell slowly struck and as if blown down from a very great height. . . . When, having followed his host through a passage and up the stairs, an uplifted tall candle flinging cascades of banister shadows over the richly ornamented walls, he entered the room over the shop, it was with a vague sense of having come an incredible distance in space and time —the street seemed far away, remote seemed the snowy square where, surely only a quarter of an hour ago, the clock had struck four, remotest of all seemed his own poor lodgings, where the fire probably needed replenishing. Had he not even come a long way from himself—was his name still Dace?

"The piece that has fallen over!" said the Jew and gave a short laugh. He had set the candle on the chimneypiece, where its light, duplicated in the dusty mirror, was sufficient to show a faded room crowded with odds and ends. "That's shrewd—that's shrewd. That goes, certainly, to the root of things. . . . So you knew, all the time!"

"Knew? . . ."

"You were merely drawing me out, leading me on! Well, well! That was clever."

Dace met the Jew's richly insinuating stare with bland and genial acquiescence.

"What makes you think I knew?"

"My dear chap! . . . Are you joking? . . . Why, of course, it was your allusion to Judas."

"Oh, I see—my allusion to Judas . . ."

"The piece that has fallen over, as you so nicely put it!"

"Oh—that! . . . So that is Judas? . . . But I didn't, to tell the truth, know it at all. I knew nothing whatever!"

The Jew smiled at him with an excess of politeness, but the smile slowly faded.

"But—how extraordinary! You really knew nothing?"

"As I say—nothing whatever."

"But how on earth then did you come to speak of the piece that has fallen over?"

They exchanged a long look over this question, as if (absurd! Dace found time to say to himself) it was, somehow, of tremendous import. But decidedly, it *was* of tremendous import. Whether the man were mad or not—and for the first moment Dace clearly formulated to himself that possibility—or whether he himself was on the verge of madness, did not seem particularly to matter. What was remarkable, or uncanny, was the way in which their sanity, or madness, brought them in every consciousness together. That singular vision of the chessmen—how explain it? His mental eye reverted to it, and he saw it now more sharply than ever. He saw the crisscrossing of shadows among the pieces, he saw deeply carved on the crown of the king nearest him the letters "I. N. R.—" (and no doubt the other "I" was turned away from him); and there was Judas lying at the lefthand corner of the board, apparently on the point of rolling off. He put out his finger to it, tried to lift it—it was immovable, as if glued. But it *must* be moved! He felt the gathering within himself of a great wave of energy, all directed to a huge decuman crash against the importunate obstacle . . . Then he removed his hand from the edge of the small taboret (which he had hardly noticed) and leaned back in his chair once more with a sense of temptation undergone and partially resisted. But again it was a yielding

to some small faint beckoning, some fugitive far signal, that put the next words on his tongue.

"Well," he said, and he laughed a little uneasily, "I'm sure I can't explain it. But no sooner had you spoken of seeing the chessmen in dreams than I had on the spot a kind of waking dream myself. I've just had it again. I didn't see *all* the pieces plainly—but plain enough was the piece which you say is Judas and plain enough was the inscription on the crown of one of the kings."

"You mean the letters?"

"I. N. R. I."

"Ah, yes. Exactly—*Rex Iudœorum*—How extraordinary!"

"To put it very mildly!"

"What? . . . Oh, I don't mean that."

"I beg your pardon, then—but what *do* you mean?"

The Jew regarded him searchingly; Dace felt himself being slowly fathomed and gave himself agreeably to the experience, with a sense that he must keep still, let the plummet go straight.

"I mean"—the Jew was deliberate—"that while you see so much without assistance—oh certainly, quite without assistance—you nevertheless don't see all."

"All?"

"Yes, that's what I find extraordinary. When, downstairs in the shop, you suddenly asked me, 'And the piece that has fallen over—what piece is that?'—how could I but assume that your identification was complete? . . . I—as you saw—accepted you. And now you say you didn't at all recognize the piece as Judas! Certainly, that is very peculiar. I must suppose, however, as all the circumstances urge, that you would, had you been given time, have named Judas yourself. Yes, undoubtedly that is the explanation."

The look which the Jew turned on Dace shone with the most perfect innocence and trust, and he replied to it with a grave nod. The logic was reasonable, was it not? Yet something in what the Jew said perplexed and escaped him; he went over it slowly, aware that somewhere in this small plausible structure of words was one word which was not so much a block as a window—it let through a light which was disquietingly suggestive of a space beyond space, of a depth which yawned beneath the solid, a world that was, as he was at last to phrase it, "other." He found this word quickly enough—it was "identification"—and looked hard through it. What on earth had he meant by it? . . . It was simply a depth, a gleam, and nothing more. Yet for some reason he decided not to challenge it—not, at any rate, immediately. Wouldn't it be more fruitful simply to wait before it, exactly as one would wait before a lighted window, to find out at last what it was precisely that moved there on the other side? Was it not also essential that he should, in everything, take his cue from the Jew?

It was, therefore, with a sense of the imperative necessity of delaying, of somehow gaining time, that he rose from his chair as if merely to look about him. The room to which he had been brought was extraordinary—a museum in microcosm. The candle, placed on the white marble mantel precariously between a tall much-figured clock and a Han horse, lighted the chamber only sufficiently to show its richness and its confusion. The only cleared space was that immediately before the fire where the two chairs faced each other obliquely on the worn Persian carpet: for the rest, narrow lanes led hither and thither among a chaos of furniture and oddments which, in the gloom, had amazingly the air of a jungle. Chairs stood on tables; ivories and pictures balanced on chairs; shields, swords, and suits of chain-mail hung on

the walls with tapestries and Chinese paintings. Half a dozen clocks were ticking confusedly, only one of them visible. And dust was everywhere, thick gritty dust, deposit of decades—on the mantel, the clock, the floor, the tables, here and there finger-marked. Even the mirror was dusty. And Dace, feeling the eyes of the Jew upon his back, and looking into the glass above the candle flame to examine the shopkeeper at his leisure, was able to see of him in the veiled gloom only the dimmest of outlines. He turned and faced his interlocutor.

"You have some fine things here," he murmured. "That horse, for example."

The Jew was inert. It was as if he knew Dace to be evading him. He stared a moment, then dropped his eyes.

"Ah—that little Han horse."

He was not interested in the horse, that was clear, and did not intend talking of it. But as Dace again sank into his chair sighing, the Jew leaned sharply toward him and smiled. Dace was touched by something in this smile—it was singularly gentle and friendly, a little humble. Why was it, nevertheless, that it seemed so oddly belied by the eyes? For in the eyes, lidded like a parrot's, something disquieting flickered.

"You do not yet altogether trust me—do you!" said the Jew, still smiling.

Dace laughed outright but not entirely with conviction. He was still trying, as it were, to gain time.

"Trust you? But why on earth shouldn't I? Is it any question?" . . .

"Oh, not of business, no! Certainly not. We are not concerned with business. . . . Isn't it really," he lowered his tone a little, "something very much more important?"

"Important?"

"Yes. Isn't it at bottom simply the question of our trusting—completely trusting—one another?"

Dace looked hard into the little eyes which seemed to blaze in intensity of meaning.

"Oh, that!" he exclaimed gently. He directed his unseeing stare at the fire in an effort to conceal his confusion. Where, where on earth, he cried to himself, am I going? He felt slightly dizzy but managed to affect a calm. Whether the shopkeeper was a madman or a prophet seemed for the present a wholly irrelevant question.

"That's of course taken for granted, isn't it?" he went on. And then he added, for all the world as if the words were not so much his own as somehow *given* him, "What I mean is—isn't it sufficient guarantee of our mutual trust—or sympathy at all events—that so far, for all the singularity of our intercourse, we so easily and with so little error *follow* one another?" He was pleased with himself at this, and showed it by smiling a little more lightly than before, and also by relaxing slightly in his chair.

And the shopkeeper, too, was pleased. He again, in that curious way which Dace had noticed downstairs in the shop, seemed before his very eyes in the act of changing; it was as if he became more significant, as if all his colors became brighter and richer, as if a secret low light within him had somehow been sharply turned up. The wrinkled lids lifted a little and the face became luminous with words of which Dace felt that he could almost, in advance, see the shape.

"Ah," came the pleased murmur. "Exactly. That's a good deal better, isn't it? We begin to know where we are. And isn't it important that you should agree with me (since you use the word 'follow') that *I follow you* quite as successfully as *you follow me?* I don't mean to urge or press

you—no—no. But that, I think, if you will permit my saying so, is—er—a point—"

"Of cardinal importance? Yes—I believe it is. You mean—"

"I mean that, in all the experience we are sharing, or are about to share, you are contributing—oh, quite without any assistance from me—as much as I. Or, to put it in another way, that you have been as free to accept as complete *my identification* as I have been to accept or reject yours. The responsibility is divided."

"Responsibility?"

The Jew's face clouded.

"Perhaps that's not the best word," he explained a little painfully. "There's of course no serious question of responsibility. Responsibility for what?" He laughed. "No. We can put that aside . . . though it might be as well afterward to know that it had been said."

It was clear to Dace that the Jew meant, by responsibility, responsibility for their mutual delusion. And surely there could be no harm in appearing to admit a share in the creation of it?

"Well—I'm quite ready to grant it, if you are—why not?"

Dace's friendly, and perhaps slightly paternal grin, was met by one as friendly. They remained so for a moment, smiling, smiling as over the exchange of something secret and precious. Then, firmly, Dace continued:

"But we've got rather far away, haven't we, from the set of the Twelve Disciples? What about *that?*"

"Ah, my dear fellow! Are you so determined to make a joke of it?"

"A joke? Why no."

"But surely you realize that it's just that which we've *been* all this time talking about."

"Oh! Oh! I see."

"But my dear chap, *do* you see?"

The shopkeeper's voice had become rather surprisingly loud and agitated. "*Do* you see! . . . Or have I been after all so hideously mistaken?"

"But how could you have been?"

"Ah, yes—how could I have been? It's ridiculous. . . . Tell me—" he went on slowly, as if he was feeling his way with the greatest of care. "When you think of this set, when you light it sharply for yourself, do you feel toward it, in any way, any sort of—impulse?"

Dace was startled. Impulse? Of course he did. But was it wise after all to admit it? What was this singular shopkeeper up to? . . . The rapidity of events had confused him. But it was necessary, after all—it was even imperative—that in this other-world darkness some sort of outline should be made out, some purpose or design should be guessed. Certainly it did not seem an extravagance to suppose that the Jew was mad; nor was it any more an extravagance to perceive, as he was almost sure he perceived, a slow, methodical, careful effort on the Jew's part to weave strongly the illusion and to weave into it as a vital part of it both himself and, what was more important, Dace. More obscure was the question whether the Jew was conscious of doing this. When he had so emphatically caviled over the point of their divided, their co-operative responsibility for the delusion—if it *was* a delusion—it had certainly appeared that he was, even if mad, aware of what he was doing. He had seemed quite consciously fearful lest Dace should suspect something. This odd something which he had so zealously guarded—was it at bottom nothing but a dim kind of hypnosis? But, if so, what was it for? . . . Dace looked hard into this tangle. It had no beginning and

no end, and there was no point at which he might, with any clearness of view, start to unravel it. Most disquieting of all was his inability to distinguish in his own mind that part of this growing, glimmering, mutual delusion which might—quite genuinely—and quite, as the Jew had said, "without any assistance" be his *own* strange contribution. But was *any* of it his own? . . . To admit that was to admit either one of two possibilities, neither of them comforting. It was to admit either that he himself was on the border of a kind of madness; or else that he had suddenly, with a catastrophic crash, gone through some queer crust of the world into a dimension which he had not hitherto known to exist, but which was none the less grotesquely real. But surely this was absurd! The man must be mad. Mad, but with a madness of which some intrinsic and secret element was an extraordinary power to exert an influence. Could it be also that he, Dace, by some psychological freak was in exactly the right state of mind to be easily influenced? *Was* he responsible? . . . His misgiving, however, was only momentary; and hearing again in that still strange room the ethereal far ringing of the half-hour bells from the church tower in the world he had left outside, and in a sense so far behind, his feeling of adventure was once more deepened and renewed. Strange, strange he said to himself, and found himself for no reason staring at his hands which he had lifted. Old hands, old and scarred. He stared at them hard, as if he desired to look into them, to discover there some curious and imbedded revelation. It embarrassed him presently to find that the Jew was watching this action intently, and had lifted his own hands into the same position. His answer was thus, in a manner, startled out of him. Was the Jew then in the very act of hypnotizing him? . . .

"Impulse?" he said. "I thought I had told you. Yes—I

have an impulse, a curious and very strong one. I think it must have been because of that impulse that I've just found myself, as you seem to have observed—" he laughed—"staring so idiotically at my old hands. . . . Each time that I have clearly visualized this set of chessmen with its kings and its fallen Judas I have half-surrendered to the most unaccountable impulse to *right* the fallen piece. And each time on coming to my senses I've found myself pressing very hard against—well, the show case downstairs, the taboret, here. That, I suppose, is what you mean?"

The Jew nodded.

"Exactly. And now. . . . But first let me repeat that you are—how shall I put it—mentally quite free in this matter—isn't that true?"

"But of course—how could it not be?" Dace, saying this, felt a little disingenuous.

"Well. The interesting question then is—do you see any *reason* for this impulse? . . . Don't let me hurry you—take your time. Try, if you like, lighting the board for yourself once more. Observe, if you can, when you feel this impulse, whether it is connected with any profound feeling of *identification*—or shall we say, rather, sympathy? . . . Perhaps I embarrass you. I'll turn my back."

The Jew walked to the mantel and, resting one foot on the brass fender, appeared to stare into the disintegrating coal fire. Identification! That word again. It was important—it meant that something, something very peculiar, was expected of him. Left thus to himself, Dace felt that at last a definite turning-point had come, and felt also quite clearly that it was in his power to "go on" or not, just as he chose; not merely a power to refuse or acquiesce, but something much more singular—a power, if he liked, to acquiesce *creatively*. If the man was mad—and certainly the worn

and shiny back, the high-peaked shoulders and comically bald head combined to produce an effect of decided queerness—his madness might be harmless, and was also, for Dace—and this struck him as remarkable—perfectly, potentially *transparent*. What Dace felt was indeed that if now he were to make the smallest effort (of a sort which he recognized brilliantly, but could scarcely analyze) he would not only be able to see the mechanism of the Jew as clearly as one sees the mechanism of a glass-cased clock, but also exactly what that mechanism, so driven and so eccentric, would demand of *himself*. Even this was not all. For was it not also true that, once he accepted this course, something of himself would have to be surrendered? . . . Would it not definitely involve his "descent" or "ascent" or whatever into that curious void, already glimpsed, of the "other" world? . . . Was he not quite clearly putting himself in the hands of this Jew? . . . Certainly the mere summoning up once more, before his mind's eye, of the chessboard, the peculiar set of chessmen, was absurdly easy—he could do it without any effort whatever. It was in fact already, to all intents, there—he had only to look at it. If there was something just the least disquieting in this fact—in the fact that he might almost say that his mind was in a manner *possessed*—he at once waved the suggestion away. He looked then once again at the visionary board. It was closer, more pressingly vivid and alive than ever. He could certainly, if he liked, put his hand out and touch it—he could certainly put his hand among the pieces, past the white king (whose crown showed the letters I. N. R.) and lift the fallen knight, which was Judas. This was what he desired to do—he put out his hand, and as he did so, realized for the first time how extraordinarily important this action was for him. The fallen piece, however, resisted him as before, resisted

his thought, would not be otherwise conceived than as fallen. But it *must* be lifted! He strained at the shadow, concentrating against it a whole world of shadows. He bent his life against it. It could not be seized, it would not budge. It was as if he were—yes—trying to lift a part of himself—a symbol—.

The revelation after all was sudden enough to shock him. He broke into a cold sweat, and barely mastered an impulse to spring to his feet. There was still time to "go back"—he seemed to see it, however, as a long way, and as involving also a sort of cowardice. It was to go back into—well, hadn't he in the snow-filled square called it the slow crucifixion of middle age—boredom? This could hardly be worse, though he now knew, with a sense rather spacious and vast than precise, that it involved danger. Still it was possible to go forward, was it not, with caution? He would keep *some* part of his wits about him—still free and his own. He was a match, he felt, for—well, for that Jew. He needn't be influenced, need he, beyond a certain point? . . .

He opened his eyes which during his waking-dream he had shut, and rose. The Jew turned about. For a moment the two men regarded each other in silence, a silence broken only by the small feverish ticking of invisible clocks. The shopkeeper, when at last he spoke, spoke in a tone which had become, for no apparent reason, sardonic and slightly tyrannous. He leaned back, with his elbows behind him on the white-marble mantel.

"Well?" he said.

Dace was cool—he allowed himself a slightly ironic smile.

"You were quite right," he rang out. Then, measuring with the nicest accuracy the queer light in the other's eyes, he went on with a considered leisureliness which he perhaps intended to be provocative, "I do identify myself with one

of the pieces on the board—as you so perspicaciously suggested. . . . I identify myself with Judas."

"I didn't suggest it," cried the Jew. "I didn't suggest it! As God is my witness . . . Don't think it!"

Dace was amazed by the violence of this outburst. He was amazed also by the change in the Jew's appearance. He stood rigid and tall, his fists clenched at his sides, his face white as the marble, his large mouth grotesquely opened in a fixed and tragic expression of suffering, like the mouth of the tragic mask. He was absurd—Dace had even a fleeting desire to "kick" him—but he was also portentous.

"I think you misunderstand me," Dace pursued, endeavoring to speak without agitation. "You merely suggested that I might, during this waking-dream, experience some feeling of sympathy—am I not right? Well, I now tell you that that is true. God knows how you guessed it!" He laughed apologetically. "And I improve on your suggestion quite clearly when I tell you that in this dream *Judas and I are one and the same person* . . . Isn't it extraordinary!"

The Jew, at this, merely gasped. Then relaxing, and as if he had suddenly become faint, he sank into a chair where he dropped his face into his hands and began absurdly rolling his great dark curly head from side to side, as if in an ecstasy of pain. "Ah, my God," he breathed through his hands, without looking up. "Ah, my God, my God!"

Dace, if he was surprised by the spectacle, did not show it. He merely watched, with the absorbed amusement of a child, this uncontrolled and unexplained behavior, and smiled. The top of the Jew's head with its bald spot ringed with curls, thus rolling heavily and serpentinely with that sinuous unction peculiar to camels and Jews, simply struck him as funny.

He was also, however, somewhat disgusted. And it was with some severity that he asked, after a moment:

"Are you feeling ill?"

The shopkeeper stopped rolling his head. His face remained hidden in his hands, nevertheless, and it was some time before he sat up, looking extraordinarily ravaged and pale, and with his large mouth still tragically relaxed. His voice, when at last he spoke, had changed, had become harsh, deep, tortured, uncertain—"biblical," Dace had time to say to himself.

"You persist in being flippant," the voice cried, "you have no seriousness. You permit yourself merely to be amused by all this. And you have the impertinence to ask me if I am ill when, as you might see, I am simply overcome by compassion. My God! Don't you see that it is serious, that it is tragic—that we sound together the whole horror of the world?"

He glared at Dace with unexpected ferocity. Then, before Dace had time for anything but a turmoil of bewilderment, he sprang up, approached Dace's chair menacingly, leaned over him, pointed at him a white thick finger on which were three rings.

"You are Judas, and you admit it. Don't pretend any longer that you don't fully realize it. The time for such foolery is past. You are Judas. You knew it before you came in here—you came in to tell me. You knew the countersign—you asked for the set of Twelve Disciples. Ah! I know everything. You tried to fool me, but you couldn't—I saw through your pretences from the beginning—I knew you were coming today. And why shouldn't I? It's Easter Eve. You know as well as I do that we always meet on Easter Eve! . . ."

Dace sat as if hypnotized, his glassy eyes fixed on the

thick withered eyelids of the Jew. He was frightened and found it difficult to control his voice.

"Why, what do you mean?" he stammered.

"What do I mean! You ask me what do I mean! Ah, my God! Do I have to drag it all out of you like this? You have no honesty, no seriousness, no repentance? You are Judas. You were born in the island of Kerioth. You murdered your father and married your mother. . . . Pilate! Pilate! Do you hear? . . . You kept books for Pilate. You cheated him. And then you went looking for Jesus, because you thought he could forgive you for incest. Ha! And you cheated him too; you stole from him. You kept back the moneys. Your passion came on you—you wanted gold and silver. You stole from the shepherds, in the market place—you stole from the other disciples. Finally, because your fingers itched, you sold Jesus. What's the good of denying it? I can see that you remember it—you knew it all the time. It's Easter Eve, and you've come back again. I knew you were coming—I know everything."

The Jew stepped back with a gesture of triumph, dropping his hand. He squared his high-peaked shoulders as if in a paroxysm of righteousness. His coarse face was radiant—transfigured.

"Well," said Dace in a small voice but clearly, "suppose I *am* Judas—suppose I *do* admit it. Suppose I admit even that I knew it before I came here, and came here with the sole purpose of revealing myself to you? You know everything—so I suppose I'll have to grant you that I even knew that the set of the Twelve Disciples was the password which, I take it, we're in the habit of exchanging in this extraordinary fashion, every Easter Eve. Is this Easter Eve? I didn't know it. I suppose I'm allowed a respite from Hell

on Easter Eve—is that it? . . . But, supposing that all this is true—what about it?"

"Ah," the Jew cried, "you're incorrigible. . . . Why do you always make it so—difficult for me! If only once, once you would admit it all—tell me everything from your heart—help me to sound the horror of the world instead of leaving me to sound it alone! Only once!" He sank into his chair, flung his head back and regarded Dace pityingly as from an immense moral distance.

"Listen!" said Dace. "I want you to believe me when I tell you that I'm not trying to deceive you or make it hard for you. I'm honestly trying to tell you everything I know. If there are some things I don't know which you think I ought to know—well, it's because there's some barrier which I don't understand, some barrier. Do you see? . . . For example, I suppose I ought to know—since I've met you so often—who you are. But I don't! . . . Who are you?"

"I am Ahasver—the eternal Jew."

"Oh! You are—I see. And we meet every Easter Eve?"

"Every Easter Eve."

"You are eternal—of course, I've heard of you. As for me, I suppose I'm just, for the moment, reincarnated?"

"Reincarnated."

"That, I suppose, is why you can remember me, but I can't remember you."

"You *must* remember!"

"I don't. I remember nothing."

"Try! Think of last year."

"I don't remember last year."

"Salt Lake City! It was in Salt Lake City. Do you remember?"

"No. I've never been to Salt Lake City."

"You have—you were there last year. My shop was in

Myrtle Street. We met outside it, just as six o'clock struck. You were smoking a pipe. When I asked you who you were, you said your name was O'Grady."

"Oh! Did I?"

"Yes. You said at first that you wanted to pawn something—your watch. You looked very different. You had a beard. Then we were inside the shop and the door was shut—"

"Ah! I asked for a peculiar set of chessmen!"

"You remember! You remember! . . . And the year before it was at Buenos Ayres. . . . My shop was on the second floor, over a colonnade. I had a sign hanging outside—with my name on it, Juan Espera en Dios. . . . You were a little Portuguese Jew named Gomez—your skin was very yellow, you were suffering from the jaundice. Do you remember?"

"No, I've never been to Buenos Ayres. Never."

"Ah, you shameless liar! . . . Liar! . . . You lie merely to make me suffer. Don't. Don't. And the year before that—"

"My dear fellow, do you remember them all?"

"Every one. It was on the Ponte Vecchio—my name was over the door, Butta Deus. A very small shop with bracelets and filigree necklaces. Ah! you were very droll that time—and very shabby, poor. A poor tailor; you said your name was Fantini. You had no thumb on your left hand, and said it didn't interfere with your work—you showed me how flexible and cunning were your fingers. And ah, my God, how stubborn you were—how you denied it! But you always deny it, you always torture me. . . . It is my punishment."

The Jew covered his eyes with one hand and sank into an absorbed silence. He looked as if he was praying. Dace examined him in astonishment, observed the tufts of grizzled

hair in his ears, the gray sparse whorls of beard under the edges of the jaw, the greasy old-fashioned black stock under the lowered chin. Three heavy gold rings were on the fourth finger, one of them set with a coarse peach-agate. Behind him in the tumbled room somewhere, a clock struck seven in a small sweet voice, then another, nearer at hand, more briskly and loudly; then two others, simultaneously, their voices—one brazen and one treble—infelicitously mingling. Seven o'clock? But to Dace the world seemed timeless; and he felt extraordinarily, with a bright translucence that made him feel bodiless, that he was existing separately, at one and the same time, in Salt Lake City, Buenos Ayres, Florence—and where else? He seemed to know himself perfectly as O'Grady—he was tall and bearded, smoked a pipe, walked in the warm clear dusk into Myrtle Street where, sure enough, the Jew awaited him. But what was the Jew's name, then? He had forgotten to say. . . . Certainly, as Gomez he had had the jaundice, as Fantini had lost his left thumb. Absurd! And this ghostly multiple career extended back, troubled, passionate, full of sinister echoes, for eighteen hundred and thirty-five years. And the unchanging secret in him, through all this harlequinade, was Judas! These hands were the hands of Judas—the hands of the parricide, the thief, the betrayer. . . . And what, in all this amazing nightmare, so profoundly actual, did the Jew want of him? Sympathy? An exchange of understanding? . . . He tried to remember what it was that the Jew had done, what offence it was that his eternal wanderings were a punishment for. Perhaps if he closed his eyes it would come back to him. For a moment he would submit a little, allow this extraordinary influence— Ah! it began to come back to him. It was something outrageous, something revolting—there was a crowd—Jesus was passing, carrying something—

and the shopkeeper—Ahasver—what was it he did? He leaned forward out of the crowd and spat at Jesus and said something—that was it. Something hateful.

"What was it you said?" Dace asked.

"On the Ponte Vecchio?"

"No—on Golgotha."

"Ah, I won't repeat it—every time you ask me to repeat it! And you know as well as I do!"

"I know you said something—I don't know what you said."

The Jew leaped to his feet, his face flushed with fury. He made a gesture of curved hands towards Dace's throat, as if he would like to strangle him.

"Hypocrite! You sit there and pretend you know nothing—you, my only friend! Well, I'll tell you what I did—I spat in His face—that's what I did! Yes! I leaned out and spat right in His face, and said in a loud ugly voice 'Go on quicker!' And He stopped and looked at me—Ah, you can see him stopping—and answered—'I go: but thou shalt wait till my return' . . . That's what happened, Judas! . . . And you, where were you? On Olivet with an old bit of rope, the halter of an ass! What could have been more appropriate than the halter of an ass? But it did you no good. No. You were merely doing what you'd have to do over and over again. For you too were included in the words 'There be some of those that stand here which shall in no wise taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.'"

"We are friends, then," murmured Dace. "We are friends!"

"We are the oldest friends in the world. And yet you torture me!"

"I don't mean to torture you. I am trying to understand."

"I forgive you, my friend—I forgive you." And suddenly the Jew leaned down and touched with his white soft hand the right hand of Dace, where it rested on the arm of the chair; a touch fawning and horrible. There were tears in his eyes. He patted Dace's hand twice with a grotesque and repulsive tenderness, and smiled; then, straightening:

"No one else forgives us—why shouldn't we forgive each other? God has forgotten us—he only remembers to forget us. Ah, my old friend, let us not forget each other! Let us remember each other all we can, and forgive each other with all our hearts. You see why it is that I want so horribly, so horribly, to have you remember me! To be an outcast, eternal, hated by God and man, unforgiven, loved by none—to be used by God for his own inscrutable Divine purpose, yet punished for it forever! Perhaps God means that we shall be a comfort to each other. Perhaps he means in that way to reward us—to grant us as recompense the greatest, deepest, oldest friendship ever known by men."

"Yes," said Dace faintly, "why not? Why not? . . . Perhaps he does."

"I am sure of it, my friend—Judas, I am sure of it! We have a bond, the greatest of bonds. Each of us committed a sin in its way unparalleled. No others have sounded the depths that we have sounded. At the very bottom of the world, most miserable Gehenna of Gehennas, we meet and embrace. Surely that is something! Yes, I believe it is a proof of the essential goodness and wisdom and mercifulness of God. I wrong him by saying that he has forgotten us! He has not forgotten us. Isn't it perhaps truer to say that we are a part of God, the part of him that is evil and that suffers? What a vision! What pride we can legitimately take in being ourselves! In us is concentrated the most intense suffering, the deepest darkness, the most unmitigated

horror of the world. . . . Let us share it, old friend—on this one day in the year when we meet, for these few uncertain hours in an infinity of torment—let us share our grief and pride, and open our hearts."

Dace was extraordinarily moved by this speech, but he could scarcely have said whether he was more impressed, or horrified, or amused. So this was where they were—at the bottom of the world, at the bottom of the bottomless pit. What a vision, indeed! And himself and this repulsive shopkeeper—sinister dual embodiment of the world's evil—embracing passionately in the blown smoke of Gehenna. Treachery kissing obscenity! Laughter would have been a relief to him, but he felt with a peculiar anxiety that the moment was not propitious. Wasn't there still, somewhere in all this, a danger? Something there was which the Jew had said that had alarmed him; but he could not now recall it. Decidedly, he must keep his wits with him.

"Yes," he answered slowly, with averted eyes, "we are old friends; our sympathies ought to be of the profoundest. We are, as you say, in the same boat—if it is not flippant to put it in so homely a fashion. We know each other, don't we? And there we are."

"Ah," said the Jew, "but do you know me as I know you? That is the question that curses me, that always curses me! You are so hesitant, so uncertain! You distress me so with your questions, and with the blanks in your memory! If only we were *exactly* alike, and you remembered, each year, all that I remember!"

"It's a pity—it's a pity."

"A tragedy, rather! . . . For me a tragedy. . . . Yet I mustn't be selfish. That is the part assigned to me—to remember, to be the memory. I must remember your sor-

rows as well as my own. It is my privilege to remind you. Corfu, for example! Do you remember Corfu?"

"Corfu? No."

"To-night in Corfu they are stoning you. Listen!" The Jew lifted a peremptory finger, commanding silence. Dace listened intently, as if he really expected to hear something; but nothing disturbed the sequestered hush of the room save the ticking of clocks, their own breathing, and the sinking of coals in the grate. Why on earth Corfu? An island in the Adriatic, was it?

"I hear nothing," he said.

"In Corfu on every Easter Eve they stone you. Every window is opened and old crockery, stones, and sticks are flung violently into the streets. I can hear it. I can see the angry faces. I can hear the screams of hate and triumph. And ah, my God, I can feel the stones on my body, in my soul, wretched compassionate creature that I am! . . . Do you feel them? Do you hear them?"

"Nothing whatever—no."

The Jew seemed hurt, bewildered. He stared at the floor.

"No—you hear nothing, feel nothing. . . . I suppose God intended it so. . . . And yet it seems as if you ought to be prepared. A warning would be an act of mercy. To remember nothing, to experience the tragedy afresh each time! Horrible."

"A warning? What do you mean?"

The Jew fixed Dace's eyes intently. What strange light was it that tried there, through the smoke of confused emotions, to flash out? Compassion? Cunning? But the eyelids lowered, the Jew looked away. Then he said, tonelessly:

"I mean for your hanging."

Dace, at this, felt that his heart had stopped beating altogether. His consciousness flew off like a vapor, he experienced, for a timeless instant, a perfect and horrible annihilation. Then his ears began ringing, his temples were hammered like cymbals, his arms violently trembled. The room came back to him, but smaller, more real and shabby in the candlelight; and the Jew before him, musing in his chair, seemed also unaccountably shabbier and smaller. He felt slightly sick.

"Oh," with hardly a tremor, "I'm to hang myself?"

"Ah, my dear friend!" wailed the Jew. "My dear friend!" He wrung his hands.

"But here—in this room?"

"It is better so—is it not? That's as it always is."

"O, it's always so, I see. . . . And O'Grady, what about O'Grady?"

"O'Grady? What do you mean?"

"He hung himself for you in Salt Lake City?"

"Not for me—not for me! For God!"

"And Gomez—and the tailor, Fantini?"

"Yes—" the Jew whispered. "They too. All of them. Every year. . . . My poor friend! I was afraid, afraid that you didn't remember. I've done my best for you. I've tried to—"

"Break the news gently? Yes! So you have. I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

The two men stared at each other. It was then Dace who went on:

"There's the trivial purely practical matter of the rope," he said. "I suppose you have the rope."

"Yes. I'll get it for you. It's the same one."

"The halter of the ass?"

"Yes."

The Jew rose, sighing, took the candle and went to a high cupboard in the front corner of the room by the shuttered window. The lifted candle, when the door had been flung back, lighted a tall crucifix within, the figure of Christ carved from a pallid greenish stone. Below it on the cupboard floor stood an earthen bowl. It occurred to Dace that the bowl might bear the stains of sacrifice. The Jew lifted from a hook a small coil of rope, closed the cupboard, and returned to Dace.

"There!" he said. "Take it."

Dace rose, but he did not take the rope. Instead he took up his hat from the taboret. At the Jew's look of astonished incredulity, he laughed.

"No," he then said. "I shan't take it—I must be going. It's late."

"Going?" stammered the Jew. Then he cried out again, horribly, in his biblical prophetic voice—"going, without—"

"Certainly; going without hanging myself. Do you seriously expect me to hang myself for you?"

He laughed again. Then as the shopkeeper, angrily flushed, took a step forward, he took a similar step to meet him.

"Listen," he cried. "You're insane! insane! and you know it."

A look of desolation, of horror, relaxed the Jew's face—the jaw sagged, the large mouth opened. He sat down, still holding the rope.

"That's right—sit down. And don't you dare to move till I'm out of this house—do you hear? Sit still! Or I'll report you to the police."

He took the candle and walked slowly to the door through

the aisle of dusty furniture. At the door a thought suddenly struck him. He set down the candle, took out a card, wrote on it, and put it on a table.

"Here's my name and address," he said. "Send me in the morning the set of the Twelve Disciples! . . . Good-by!"

The shopkeeper, whom he could only dimly make out in the now almost unlighted jungle of bric-a-brac, made no answer. Dace turned, went down the stairs, put the candle on the floor, and let himself out.

When three days had passed without his having had any signal from the Jew, Dace determined to go to see him. The adventure, he thought, must be an anti-climax; but there were one or two possibilities about which he was curious. Was it not conceivable, for example, that the wretched man, in some obscure sort of religious ecstasy, might have done himself a violence? . . . It was in bright sunlight that he passed this time through the square and turned into the shopping district; not yet noon. Missing for a fraction of a minute the shop, which was small, he had a renewal of his excitement—it seemed to him not too incredible that the shop and its singular proprietor might never have existed at all. But here it was.

What startled him was that the Jew did not recognize him, not in the slightest. He had uttered no greeting on entering, had merely looked at the shopkeeper, expecting that the result would be an exclamation. But the Jew simply looked up from his glass case, which was opened at the back, and where he seemed to be arranging a small plush tray of jades and corals—looked up with a mild polite interest. And as Dace, surprised, stared at him, it was the Jew who was the first to speak.

"Good morning!" he said. His tone was friendly—not intimate, not obsequious. "Is there something I can show you?"

Dace looked very hard at those green eyes under their sleepy lids.

"I am looking, as a matter of fact, for something odd in the way of a set of chessmen."

The shopkeeper was suavely interested.

"Chessmen? Certainly. Had you anything particular in mind?"

Dace's heart gave a leap. The Jew was putting away his jades, unconcerned.

"Well—what I should really like to get hold of is a set I've heard called the set of the Twelve Disciples. Do you happen to know anything about it?"

The shopkeeper tapped his fingers idly on the glass.

"No, I can't say I do. Twelve Disciples! No. Very curious. . . . Do you know where it was made?"

Dace leaned forward against the case.

"I don't; no . . ." He stared at the shopkeeper, who was very close to him. "Tell me—haven't we met before?"

The Jew returned his stare perplexedly.

"I don't think so—have we? I have a good memory for faces—bad for names. Still, I may be at fault!"

"I think you are—I think you are!" Dace said, and laughed. "You're wearing glasses today—you weren't before."

"Oh?" The Jew's smile was friendly but vague.

"Yes . . . Don't you remember taking me to your room upstairs? You showed me a crucifix in a cupboard."

"Did I?" The shopkeeper smiled, wagged his ugly head, shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, then I *am* at fault. I take so

many people up there, you see, to look at things—you must forgive me!"

"Oh, I forgive you!"

They chuckled together amicably. Then Dace bought a Chinese set of carved ivory and bade the Jew good-morning.

THE END

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

On the Authors

(Alphabetically arranged)

Aiken, Conrad (Potter). Born at Savannah, Georgia, 1889, graduated from Harvard, 1911. Author of several volumes of verse: *Earth Triumphant and Other Tales*, 1914; *Turns and Movies*, 1916; *The Jig of Forslin*, 1916; *Nocturne of Remembered Spring*, 1917; *The Charnel Rose*, 1918; *The House of Dust*, 1920; *Punch, The Immortal Liar*, 1921; *Priapus and the Fool*, 1922; *The Pilgrimage of Festus*, 1923. Also a critical volume: *Scepticisms—Notes on Contemporary Poetry*, 1919. Editor of an anthology of modern American poets (1922). Contributing editor of *The Dial*, 1917-19. Has lived in England during recent years and has turned to writing short stories, of which "The Disciple" is an outstanding example. A collection of his fiction has been published (1925) under the title, *Bring, Bring and Other Stories.*

Babcock, Edwina Stanton. Born at Nyack, N. Y. Author of *Greek Wayfarers and Other Poems*, 1916; *The Flying Parliament and Other Poems*, 1919; *Under the Law* (a novel), 1922. Has contributed many short stories to *Harper's* and other magazines. Lives at South Nyack, N. Y., and Nantucket, Mass.

Banning, Margaret Culkin (Mrs. Archibald T. Banning). Vassar, 1912. Author of several novels: *This Marrying*, 1920; *Half Loaves*, 1921; *Spellbinders*, 1922; *Country Club People*, 1923; *A Handmaid of the Lord*, 1924. Has written many short stories. Another story of hers, "A Great Club Woman," won honorable mention in the Contest. Lives in Duluth.

Brown, Alice. Born Hampton Falls, N. H., 1857; graduated Robinson Seminary, Exeter, N. H., 1876. Author of many novels, vol-

umes of short stories and of verse, and other books: *Fools of Nature; Meadow-Grass* (New England stories); *By Oak and Thorn* (English travels); *Life of Mercy Otis Warren; The Road to Castaly* (poems); *The Day of His Youth* (a story); *Robert Louis Stevenson—A Study* (with Louise Imogen Guiney); *Tiverton Tales* (stories); *The King's End,* 1901; *Margaret Warrener,* 1901; *The Mannerings; High Noon; Paradise; The Country Road,* 1906; *The Court of Love,* 1906; *Rose MacLeod,* 1908; *The Story of Thyrza,* 1909; *Country Neighbors* (stories), 1910; *John Winterborne's Family,* 1910; *The One-Footed Fairy,* 1911; *The Secret of the Clan,* 1912; *Vanishing Points* (stories) 1913; *My Love and I,* 1913; *Children of Earth* (which won the Winthrop Ames play prize of $10,000), 1915; *The Prisoner,* 1916; *Bromley Neighborhood,* 1917; *The Flying Teuton,* 1918; *The Back Drop,* 1919; *The Wind Between the Worlds,* 1920; *Homespun and Gold,* 1920; *One-Act Plays,* 1921; *Louise Imogen Guiney—A Study,* 1921; *Old Crow,* 1922; *Ellen Prior,* 1923; *The Mysteries of Ann,* 1925. Lives in Boston.

Carver, Ada Jack (Mrs. J. B. Snell). Won second prize in a story contest held a few years ago by *The Southern Woman's Magazine,* and second prize in a scenario contest held by the *Chicago Daily News,* but had never had a story published in a magazine of national circulation until "Redbone" appeared in *Harper's.* Lives in Minden, Louisiana.

Dobie, Charles Caldwell. Born at San Francisco, March 15, 1881. Was in the fire and marine insurance business until 1916, since when he has devoted himself to writing. His first short story appeared in The San Francisco *Argonaut* in 1910. Author of *Blood Red Dawn* (novel) 1920; and several plays: *Broken to the Plough, Ilya of Murom, Ramati, The Hidden Pool, Charity, Doubling in Brass.* Has contributed many short stories to *Harper's* and other magazines. Won two second prizes in the Harper Short Story Contest, and is the only author represented in this book by two stories. Lives in San Francisco.

Gilkyson, Phoebe Hunter (Mrs. Hamilton H. Gilkyson, Jr.). Born at Mont Clare, Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, 1892. Attended

Hollins College in Virginia 1907-09, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1911. Married in 1912; lives in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania; has four children. Has published a few short stories and poems in magazines and reviews for Philadelphia and New York papers during the last few years.

LEACH, A. R. Lives in Parkersburg, West Virginia. Has written some previous stories, but generally under a pen name. "A Captain Out of Etruria" was her first *Harper* story.

SPRINGER, FLETA CAMPBELL. Born in Oklahoma. Had newspaper experience in San Francisco before coming to New York, where she now lives. Author of a novel, *Gregg,* and of many short stories and essays. Her first *Harper* story was published in 1912; "Legend" was her seventeenth.

STEELE, WILBUR DANIEL. Born at Greensboro, North Carolina, 1886; graduated from the University of Denver, 1907; studied art in Boston, Paris, and New York, 1907-10. Author of *Storm* (a novel), 1914; *Land's End* (a collection of short stories), 1918; *The Shame Dance* (short stories), 1923; *The Isles of the Blest* (a novel), 1924; and of numerous other short stories in *Harper's* and other magazines. Awarded second prize by the O. Henry Award Committee in 1919 for his story, "They Know Not What They Do," and a special prize by the same committee two years later for maintaining the highest level of merit for three years among American short-story writers. Lives at Nantucket, Mass.

TARLEAU, LISA YSAYE. Born in Vienna. Has written several stories for the *Atlantic Monthly,* and a volume of essays and stories entitled *The Inn of Disenchantment,* 1917. "Loutré was her first *Harper* story. Mrs. Tarleau lives in New York.

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